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Travelling culture: television

Travelling culture: video

The eyes of Nelly Kaplan

Indonesia and the mother-nation

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Nelly Kaplan: *eye to the viewfinder*. Picture © Nelly Kaplan.

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Travelling culture/travelling television

YOSEFA LOSHITZKY

The eye has to travel

Diana Vreeland

Her eye can never gaze more widely than its [the screen's] frame

Benedict Anderson

The eye is a product of history, reproduced by education

Pierre Bourdieu

1 The breadth of the literature on this topic is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to mention the major works in this field: James Clifford 'Traveling cultures' in Larry Grossberg, Carry Nelson and Paula Treicher (eds) *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992) pp. 96–116; Edward Said 'Traveling theory' in *The World the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) pp. 226–47; Edward Said 'Movements and migrations' in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) pp. 326–36; Janet Wolff 'On the road again: metaphors of travel in cultural criticism' *Cultural Studies* vol. 7 no. 2 (1993) pp. 224–39.

Recent postcolonial criticism has consistently tried to locate traces of the 'old rhetoric of Empire' in what we call the postcolonial world of today. Inherent in this criticism is a condemnation of the body of knowledge created by the West on its non-western Other, the so-called Third World. This body of knowledge (which can be found in literature, film, anthropology, journalism and so on) is constituted – according to postcolonial critics – of Occidental constructions of Orientalist, Africanist, and primitivist discourses. Implied in this criticism is a latent mistrust of cross-cultural encounters in which relations of power manifest themselves. Despite this fact, recent developments in 'nomadic criticism' and 'travel theory',¹ both of which grew out of postcolonial criticism, have attempted to rescue the potential fertilizing effect of cross-cultural encounters by celebrating the exilic experiences of Third-World people in metropolitan centres. These experiences, according to the 'travel theorists', deconstruct the power relations between the 'periphery' and the 'metropolitan centre' by creating a 'deterritorialization' of culture. Edward Said occupies a central position in this debate. On the one hand, Said enthusiastically

embraces the notion of a Palestinian homeland and Palestinian nationalism. On the other, he advocates the de-essentialization of home and a celebration of exilic experiences. Said's growing ambivalence about nation and nationalism, and his celebration of metropolitan locations as the only sites where authentic contemporary documents of resistance can be created by self-exiles of Third-World origin, has recently been criticized by Aijaz Ahmad.² Ahmad claims that Said's celebration of the exilic culture created in metropolitan centres brings power back to the 'Empire'. The fact that the journal *Public Culture* devoted a whole issue to a debate about Ahmad's book *In Theory* attests to the power of his arguments.³

In this paper I will problematize some of the assumptions lying behind the celebratory attitude towards travel, as well as investigating the relationship between travel and television as forms of projection and introjection, as means of display, representation and identity formation. Both the potentialities and abuses of the use of the travel metaphor in relation to the emerging global television culture will be explored. In dealing with the relationship between travel and television I will distinguish between television as a travelling culture and television as a colonial form.⁴

2 Aijaz Ahmad. *In Theory Classes*. Nations Literatures (New York and London: Verso, 1992).

3 See *Public Culture* vol 6 no 1 (1993) a special issue devoted to a debate about Aijaz Ahmad's book *In Theory*. A testimony to the proliferation of nomadic vocabularies in the global public sphere is the fact that the 1993 Venice Biennale was devoted to 'cultural nomadism'.

4 I would like to thank Paul Frosh for illuminating this point for me.

5 Arjun Appadurai, Lauren Berlant, Carol A. Breckenridge and Dilip Gaonkar. Editorial comment. *Public Culture* vol 6 no 1 (1993) p. ix.

6 Quoted in Michael Peter Smith. *Transnational migration and the globalization of grassroots politics*. *Social Text* vol 39 (1994) p. 23.

7 *Ibid.* p. 16.

Globalization, television and 'the politics of location'

The debate between Ahmad and his critics is basically a debate about the space of empowerment for Third-World intellectuals ('the politics of location' according to *Public Culture*'s editorial introduction).⁵ What is this ideal space? Is it the nation, the state, or perhaps the diaspora? Despite the importance of this debate, it is marginal in the face of the 'real' forces that shape postcolonial encounters. Among these forces television (and not intellectuals) is one of the most powerful. Furthermore, television, perhaps more so than the modern nation-state, or the emerging ethno-diasporas of the metropolitan centres of the West, can be seen as creating a new travelling space for cross-cultural encounters. In our 'electrified' global culture, in which the physical movement of persons and objects has been replaced with the electronic movement of symbols, television has become a sort of 'travel machine'. For the moment (before the future development and mass production of virtual reality technologies) television, more than any other technology, materializes the immemorial human fantasy of transcending the boundaries of time and space in a quest for another reality. Television is, in David Harvey's suggestive phrase, 'annihilating space by time'.⁶ The globalization of mass communication scatters 'the symbolic ingredients of "imagined lives" and modes of self-empowerment even to the remotest of peripheral hinterlands'.⁷ As a global force, television has eroded the 'boundary-setting capacities of the nation-state' and rendered

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid p 22

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² The label 'foreign news' recalls the category 'foreign films' which is reserved for non-US films in the US market. This type of labelling perpetuates the global promotion of US products and is permeated with patronizing colonialist overtones defining the foreign as the rest of the world that is peripheral and Other. British and Australian films however are not categorized as foreign in the Academy Awards. Hence this labelling has the power of US products to generate a residual nostalgia for the cohesion of the white British Empire. It is similar to colonialism both in defining a subordinate Other and in terms of expanding into the world and then dominating it.

¹³ See for example Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge Polity Press 1988) and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press 1991).

¹⁴ Michael M J Fischer, 'Ethnicity and the post modern arts of memory' in James Clifford and George E Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1986) p 197.

problematic 'the distinctions between inside and outside, citizen and alien, self and other'.⁸ The global diffusion of film, television, and video 'offers powerful images of possible future lives to once geographically isolated and socially bounded peoples'.⁹

Arjun Appadurai suggests (relying on his ethnographic accounts of remote Indian villages and the life of transnational migrants) that fantasies derived from the global media 'have become driving forces in geographical mobility' and that 'today the ordinary lives of increasing numbers of transnational migrants are powered by possibilities the globalized mass media suggest are available rather than by the traditional or material givenness of things'.¹⁰ Appadurai, as Smith suggests, 'focuses largely . . . on the more positive possibilities of human mobility becoming embodied in the acting out of these global fantasies'.¹¹ As a fantasy-generating medium television is not confined to the peripheral zones of the globe, but also produces fantasies for the prosperous West. Because First-World networks provide the filter for images of the world's Other (the so-called Third World) through the institutions of 'foreign news',¹² they are part of a global structure of postcolonial constituencies. They construct the imaginative space of the Other in the western television spectator's mind. Yet the increasing globalization of television, according to postmodern criticism, threatens this very fantasy. If global television, and especially the so-called global news networks, direct the technologized gaze on the Other, then television, like tourism, colonialism and anthropology, destroys the very authenticity it desires.

Television and postmodern critique of globalization

Since the 1980s, scholars from different disciplines have tried to theorize the role played by television in the new kind of social space which has been created in our world – through the growth of criss-crossed economies and cultures – in terms of globalization. The fundamental question which they have formulated has been: does globalization destroy national/cultural identity, or is it subverted by the indigenous cultures which heroically resist globalization's homogenizing tendencies? Two assumptions are inherent in this question: 1. That the forces of globalization/homogenization are usually American and that they subjugate weaker, usually Third-World, nations. 2. That there are indeed 'indigenous', 'pure' and 'uncontaminated' cultures which are endangered by global/US culture whose main colonizing agent is television.

Postmodernist critiques of globality¹³ centre on the birth of a new common consumerist culture. To the western observer who subscribes to these postmodern theories 'late twentieth-century society globally seems to be characterized by surface homogenization'.¹⁴ It should, however, be emphasized that similar postmodernist sentiments were

already expressed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in the 1960s. Pasolini's heretical ideas concerning the *sacralità* (reverence) of primal pre-industrial and pre-bourgeois reality (existing today, according to him, only among peasants and in the Third World) were strongly criticized at the time he expressed them. His polemics against the cultural logic of late capitalism, as Giuliana Bruno suggests, 'were generally taken as nostalgia for an archaic world'.¹⁵ Bruno, however, attempts to rethink Pasolini's theory in light of postmodernist thought. In her view, Pasolini's ideas can be seen as anticipating some aspects of postmodernism. Pasolini's hatred of the world-wide spread of what he termed *cultura homogenieta* (homogeneous culture) – characterized by consumerism and the destruction of 'authentic' cultures – moved him in 1973 to create *The Arabian Nights*, the last movie in his 'trilogy of life'. The film was shot on various 'exotic' locations in Nepal, Yemen, Iran and Ethiopia in the hope of discovering in these 'uncontaminated' regions a 'free' sexuality devoid of the repression and exploitation typical of industrialized western societies. Pasolini's assumptions recall the discourse of travel literature with its romantic vision of the uncontaminated state of non-European cultures. This discourse was common to much of mid nineteenth-century Europe's experience of the alien Other.¹⁶ Pasolini's ideas were of course influenced by Antonio Gramsci's hostility to cosmopolitanism as the 'imperial-universal' and by Gramsci's insistence that 'this is to be challenged by the national–popular in the process of struggling against colonization – a stance that has influenced Third-World cultural theorists and minority intellectuals in the metropolitan world'.¹⁷

To a large extent, the fears rendered by Pasolini, as well as by postmodern critiques of globalization, regarding the erosion of public enactments of tradition, the loss of ritual and historical rootedness, echo fears expressed by 'salvage anthropology' regarding the disappearance and commodification of 'ethnic specimens'.

Pasolini, like many other 'serious' filmmakers, was an opponent of television and video. For him television was 'the modern institution which he most loathed'.¹⁸ Pasolini's attitude derived from his Gramscian-inspired belief in the need to resurrect a 'national–popular' culture and to investigate the role of the intellectual in this process. The kind of culture which Pasolini longed for, and whose loss his semi-disciple, Bernardo Bertolucci, continues to lament, is based on a plurality of popular cultures as opposed to one dominated by a single mass culture produced by neo-capitalism. In fact, Pasolini's sentiments are shared by most Italian directors – Bertolucci, Fellini, Visconti, Torraniore and Scola, among others. The Italian 'economic miracle' of the 1960s and the country's rapid industrialization were resented by many Italian directors, who combined their distaste for the new Italy with a strong nostalgia 'for the healthy and uncompromised values of a pre-industrial past'.¹⁹ This nostalgia reached its zenith in the 1980s with the rapid spread of television culture and the growing decline of

¹⁵ Giuliana Bruno 'Heresies: the body of Pasolini's semiotics' *Cinema Journal* vol 30 no 3 (1991) p 39

¹⁶ For a further discussion of this issue see Yosefa Loshitzky 'The tourist/traveler gaze Bertolucci and Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* *East-West Film Journal* vol 7 no 2 (1993) pp 111–37

¹⁷ Benita Parry 'Overlapping territories and intertwined histories Edward Said's postcolonial cosmopolitanism' in Michael Sprinker (ed.) *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell 1992) p 41

¹⁸ Zygmunt G. Baranski 'Pier Paolo Pasolini culture Croce Gramsci in Zygmunt G. Baranski and Robert Lumley (eds) *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1990) p 139

¹⁹ Stephen Gundale 'From neo-realism to *Luci Rosse*: cinema politics society 1945–85' in Baranski and Lumley (eds) *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy* p 216

cinema as a form of popular entertainment Ettore Scola's *Splendor* (1988) as well as Giuseppe Torrantore's *Cinema Paradiso* (1988) and *Tutto stanno bene* (1990) portray the 'degraded' world created by television culture and compare it, nostalgically, to the paradise-lost world of cinema. In *Cinema Paradiso* the spectatorial experience is likened to a collective religious experience performed in a cathedral. The release of these films in the late 1980s, all set in movie houses and all dealing with the spectatorial experience, attests, as Giuliana Bruno suggests, to a tendency in Italian cinema towards the nostalgic mythologization 'of cinema as a final bastion of collective life and the last symbol of a dying popular culture'.²⁰ At the 1988 Mill Valley Film Festival Bertolucci discussed cinema in similar terms: 'I still believe in the movie theatres as special spaces, cathedrals for hypnosis for all of us to dream our collective dreams'.

²⁰ Giuliana Bruno Review
Giampiero Brunetta *Buio in sala
cent anni di passioni dello
spettatore cinematografico*
Screen vol 32 no. 2 (1991)
p. 229

The Italian filmmakers' hostility to television is rooted in the distinction in Italian culture between *cultura di massa* (mass culture) and *cultura popolare* (popular culture). Whereas the former refers to manipulative consumer culture, the latter refers to culture created by the people for the people. Until recently, Italian culture was grounded in the provincial rural life of small communities where the cinema house (as in *Cinema Paradiso*) was one of the popular centres for social interaction. Since the 1976 Constitutional Court ruling which abolished the state's monopoly on broadcasting, television culture has spread rapidly, leading to the loss of cinema's audience. Atomized television viewing replaced cinema's social viewing and led to a flood of cheap television game shows and the prolific importing of US programmes. It also suppressed other expressions of popular culture. The nostalgia of Bertolucci, Pasolini and other Italian directors for Italy's rural culture reflects the crisis provoked by the transition from cinema culture (associated with the meaning assigned in Italy to popular culture) to television culture (carrying the negative connotations of mass culture).²¹

²¹ For a further discussion of this issue see Yosefa Loshitzky
Conclusions past and future
utopias in *The Radical Faces of Godard and Bertolucci* (Detroit
Wayne State University Press
1995) pp. 200-206

²² Muhammad Ayish International
communication in the 1990s
implications for the Third World
International Affairs vol. 68 no.
3 (1992) p. 487

²³ Sky is now perhaps Asia's
biggest satellite network (owned
by the media baron Rupert
Murdoch)

Gramscian anti-cosmopolitan sentiments have been carried over to Third-World criticism of western dominance of the international economic and communication system as a source of their 'undevelopment'. 'Third world spokesmen charged that such dominance posed threats to their political independence, cultural identity and socio-economic development.'²² But beyond these charges there is a frustration on the part of the Third World regarding the way they are represented by the media, and television news in particular. They charge that the global flow of information relating to the Third World is unbalanced, distorted and focused on negative rather than developmental, news thus creating an image of the Third World as a 'primitive space' of chaos, disorder and constant violence.

'Classical' criticism levelled at western media by Third-World critics has recently gained additional significance through the emerging dominance of global news networks (CNN, BBC, Sky).²³

²⁴ Homi Bhabha's and other critics' view of ambivalence and ambiguity as the salient features of colonial discourse is challenged by others. Thus for example according to Abdul JanMohamed colonialist fiction is generated predominantly by the ideological machinery of the manichean allegory and not by ambivalence. In fact JanMohamed claims that the manichean allegory is so strong that even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex. See Abdul JanMohamed 'The economy of manichean allegory: the function of racial difference in colonialist literature' *Critical Inquiry* vol 12 no. 2 (1985) p 63. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge in their attempt to define what is post-colonialism? claim: 'Those writers who use forms of "appropriation" recognize that colonial discourse itself is a complex, contradictory mode of representation which implicates both the colonizer and the colonized.' See Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge 'What is post-colonialism?' *Textual Practice* vol 5 (1991) p 404. And nowhere according to them is this tendency more evident than in the works of V S Naipaul.

²⁵ Arjun Appadurai 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy' in Bruce Robbins (ed.) *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press 1993) p 274.

²⁶ Hamid Naficy provides an interesting answer in the realm of film. He proposes a genre of independent transnational cinema which is a genre that cuts across previously defined geographic, national, cultural, cinematic and meta-cinematic boundaries. See Hamid Naficy 'Phobic spaces and liminal panics: independent transnational film genre' *East/West Film Journal* vol 8 no. 2 (1994) p 1. Recent developments in postcolonial film theory have

Not only have western networks flooded the 'nativist' periphery with mediatized commodities of late capitalism – in particular the super soap operas – but they have also turned this periphery itself into an ambivalent object of fascination/revulsion for the curious gaze of western media. The cases of Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia all attest to this phenomenon.²⁴

Travel and television

If the central problem of contemporary global interaction is, according to Arjun Appadurai, 'the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization',²⁵ then the mediation of television, one of the most powerful global forces, in cross-cultural encounters has to be reconceptualized. As we are living in an increasingly global media-saturated world, a new approach to these questions is demanded.²⁶ Indeed the 'travel theorists' whom I mentioned at the beginning of my article, and James Clifford in particular, suggest alternative ways to view culture. These 'other' ways deconstruct and de-essentialize the notions of 'home', 'centre', 'periphery', 'marginality' and 'authenticity' by replacing them with the notion of 'travel'. Clifford's notion of 'travelling cultures' is in my view both promising and problematic.

Clifford attempts to displace the traditional discourse of ethnography ('being there') with that of travel ('getting there'). Through this displacement he hopes to conceptualize culture as a site of travel which merges together cosmopolitan experiences with rooted, native ones. By looking at culture in terms of travel relations, and viewing it as a constructed site of displacement and interaction rather than an organic body, Clifford hopes to avoid 'the excessive localism of particularist cultural relativism, as well as the overly global vision of a capitalist or technocratic monoculture'.²⁷ The projection of a 'multicultural public sphere' – as opposed to hegemonic pluralism – is the result of Clifford's rethinking of culture as travel.

Clifford's notion of travel has many advantages for anthropology as well as for the anthropologist himself. His metaphor of travel operates 'to destabilize the fixed, and ethnocentric, categories of traditional anthropology'.²⁸ For Clifford, as Janet Wolff suggests,

the metaphor of 'travel' assists in the project of de-essentializing both researcher and the subject of research, and of beginning to transform the unacknowledged relationship of power and control which characterized postcolonial encounters. Here, the notion of 'travel' operates in two ways. It is both *literal* – the ethnographer does leave to do research – and *epistemological* – it describes knowledge in a different way, as contingent and partial.²⁹

There is another implication to Clifford's approach to the question of

focused on the notion of hybrid cinema in which autobiography mediates a mixture of documentary fiction and experimental genres characterizes the film production of people in transition and cultures in the process of creating identities. Laura U Marks 'A Deleuzian politics of hybrid cinema' *Screen* vol. 35 no. 3 (1994) p. 245

27 Clifford Traveling cultures p. 108

28 Wolff On the road again p. 226

29 Ibid. p. 226

30 Arif Dirlik 'The postcolonial aura: Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism', *Critical Inquiry* vol. 20 no. 2 (1994) p. 343

ethnography and culture. His approach exceedingly emphasizes the local, and hence, as Arif Dirlik suggests,

mystifies the larger contexts that differentiate power relations and that suggest more stable and directed positions. No matter how much the ethnographer may strive to change places with the native, in the end the ethnographer returns to the First World academy and the native back to the wilds.³⁰

The notion of travel thus seems to disguise the power relations involved in it, rather than to clarify culture as a site of intersection and displacement. The idea of travel raises the questions: who is travelling and what is the destination? The conception of travel as unbounded is a mystification; there are very specific sites of interaction and destination, quite literally empowered travellers going to the 'undeveloped' Third World and disempowered immigrants to the metropolitan centres of the West. Thus, no matter how much we might like to put the centre/periphery dichotomy down to a logocentric binarism, it does not help us solve the imbalance in global power relations.

Taken from this point of view, the travel metaphor, when applied to television as one of the global forces (along with tourism, western commodities, fashion, music, radio and so on) which traverse culture, may generate a doubling effect. According to a Clifford-like conceptualization, television can act as a site of travel, an intersection of cross-cultural interactions. Inherent in this conceptualization is the view of television as a potentially liberating force which equalizes global power relations. More than implicitly, it suggests that the notion of cultural imperialism is no longer tenable in regard to television. By contrast, implicit in the opposite view which is critical of Clifford's idealization of travel is the idea that the travel metaphor, if applied to television, only reinforces the asymmetry of global power relations. Television as a form of fantasy is influential in attracting disempowered travellers (immigrants who are usually involuntary travellers) to the metropolitan centres of the First World, yet its ambivalent 'gaze' on the Other perpetuates the Third World's status as undeveloped, and primitive space whose alluring power is seductive only for powerful voluntary western travellers in quest of exoticism and leisure. Hence television's globalism, like tourism, becomes 'an invasion outward from the highly developed and metropolitan centres into the uncivilized peripheries'.³¹

31 Erik Cohen 'Pilgrimage and tourism: convergence and divergence' in Alan Morris (ed.) *Sacred Journeys: the Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport: Greenwood Press 1992) p. 52

Television and global nomadism

When Diana Vreeland, a fashion editor and a special consultant to The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, said that 'the eye has to travel' she was endorsing a 'global nomadism' in search of

'beauty'. Her pilgrim routes in quest of this beauty took her to India, China, North Africa and the Middle East. In these 'corners' of the world she found foreign and glorious objects to adorn the bodies and costumes of her models who appeared on the glossy fashion magazines of the metropolitan centres. Exotica, after all, has always been a marketable commodity in the metropolitan centres of the West, and the commoditization of 'ethnicity' is part and parcel of western modernity. Much like fashion, television – one of the major, if not *the* major force of globalization – depends on visuality, on the stimulation of the sense of sight. Sight, we should remember, also plays a major role in anthropology where the ethnographer's gaze constitutes the ground for authoritative knowledge. The traditional anthropologist's claim for knowledge on which he based his authority rested on an experiential 'I was there'. The same claim for authority and truth is still at the heart of news journalism and, in particular, television journalism. Television news authority is based on the privileging of seeing as the main mode of evidence and witness. The ideology of liveness is at the core of television authority. If, however, television (like the new anthropology as it developed in postcolonial criticism) is viewed as travel – emphasizing the experience of 'getting there' rather than 'being there' – and the television news journalist is viewed (like the 'new anthropologist') as a traveller rather than an objective observer, then we can revert to Appadurai's suggestion that 'the globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization'.³²

³² Appadurai: *Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy* p. 287

Viewing television as travel deconstructs the two major assumptions inherent in the questions posed by globalization studies. First, it questions the positioning and agency of centre and margins and therefore makes obsolete the question of cultural hegemony. Second, it challenges the essentialist notion regarding 'cultural purity' and the 'fragility' of indigenous cultures by viewing cultural encounters not according to the paradigm of a weaker static culture invaded by foreign forces, but as shifting and everchanging relationships between cultures. As George Van Den Abeele claims, the very activity of travelling may also 'displace the home or prevent any return to it, thus undermining the institution of that economy and allowing for an infinite or unbounded travel'.³³

Clifford criticized the traditional anthropological point of departure which sees only the integral uniqueness of culture rather than its travel dimensions. The point of departure for the critics of television as a globalization agent is that it destroys cultural identity through a creation of homogeneous global culture. But if we accept Clifford's suggestion that we think of culture in terms of travel, then we might view television as a kind of travelling culture, rather than as an agent of 'national culture'. The rapid growth of 'liminal political spaces'³⁴ in a postcolonial world which has become a site for voluntary travel (tourists, travellers, pilgrims, immigrants) as well as involuntary travel (refugees, displaced populations, transferred populations resulting from

³³ George Van Den Abeele: *Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) p. xxv

³⁴ Lisa Malkki: 'Citizens of humanity: internationalism and the imagined communities of nations' *Diaspora* vol. 3 no. 1 (1994) p. 44

'ethnic cleansing', foreign workers, homeless, undocumented immigrants) makes the global atmosphere more receptive to the application of the metaphor of travel to television. The recent emergence of new diasporic polities in the global space previously occupied by exile and ethnic communities, immigrants, expatriates, refugees and guest workers makes the reworking of the notion of television as travel all the more 'seductive'. Various and growing forms of transnationalism constitute receptive 'sites of travel' which challenge the hegemony and homogeneity claimed by nation-states and consequently of mass media attempting to promote boundaries rather than traverse them.

The context for the rapid emergence of diasporas derives from a global situation in which the relationship between the local and the global and the place of borders is in constant flux. The status of structures 'in a world where capital, production, and peoples are in constant motion' and 'interpretations and reversals between the different worlds'³⁵ result in hybridity, is all the more conducive for the use of travel as a new metaphor for globalization. As 'the nation-state is no longer taken for granted as the global unit of political organization'³⁶ the postcolonial subject 'is comprehended in terms of hybridness or "in-betweenness", he is not contained any more within fixed categories or binary oppositions'³⁷ what Benedict Anderson calls 'the postmodern exodus'³⁸ or 'post-1930s nomadism'³⁹ – namely the massive migration to the metropolitan cores – creates two types of political consequence in our rapidly changing world. The first consequence is 'the recent emergence in the United States and other older nation-states of an ethnicity . . . out of which the 'ideological program of multiculturalism'⁴⁰ has emerged. In Europe this tendency is manifested through an 'ethnicization' process – or 'neo-tribalism' to use Philip Schlesinger's derogatory language⁴¹ – in which racism is a very strong element (The National Front, Le Pen's movement in France and the rise of right-wing extremism in Germany). The second consequence is the emergence of what Anderson calls 'long-distance nationalism'⁴² in which migrants in the prosperous West support extremist nationalism back home.

With the mass movement of populations across national and regional boundaries 'fragmentation of the global into the local has emerged into the foreground of historical and political consciousness'.⁴³ The situation created by global capitalism helps explain certain phenomena that have become apparent over the last two or three decades, but especially since the 1980s

global motions of peoples (and therefore, cultures), the weakening of boundaries (among societies, as well as among social categories), the replications in societies internally of inequalities and discrepancies once associated with colonial differences, simultaneous homogenization of the global and the local, and the

³⁵ Dirlin, *The postcolonial aura*, p. 355

³⁶ Ibid. p. 330

³⁷ Ibid. p. 336

³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Exodus: Critical Inquiry* vol. 20 no. 2 (1994) pp. 314–27

³⁹ Ibid. p. 322

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 325

⁴¹ Philip Schlesinger, 'Europeanness – a new cultural battlefield?' *Innovation* vol. 5 no. 1 (1992) p. 13

⁴² Anderson, *Exodus*, p. 326

⁴³ Dirlin, *The postcolonial aura*, p. 347

disorganization of a world conceived in terms of three worlds or nation-states.⁴⁴

Global space, as Michael Peter Smith claims, is 'a space of flows' The boundaries of the nation-state

no longer correspond to the social spaces . . . borderless people inhabit The blurring of once taken-for-granted boundaries differentiating states, ethnicities, and civil societies is producing new spaces of daily life, new sources of cultural meaning, and new forms of social and political agency that flow across national borders.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Smith, *Transnational migration and the globalization of grassroots politics* pp. 15–16

⁴⁶ Appadurai, *Disjuncture and difference* p. 275

⁴⁷ Hamid Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 1993) p. 2

This new social space of deterritorialized people produced by transnational migration, this 'global ethnoscapes'⁴⁶ to use Appadurai's suggestive term, is both conducive and receptive to the notion of television as travel. The deterritorialization of our postmodern era has created, as Hamid Naficy observes, people who are not, or do not want to become, fixed in any identity. 'By their status as liminal hybrids and syncretic multiples, they form a global class that transcends their original or current social and cultural locations.'⁴⁷

'Fusion is confusion'? globalism and hybridity

In Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994), a feminist film which celebrates the growing multicultural diaspora community in the city of Birmingham, there is 'little use for characters like Oliver's black friend who closes off identity by seeing the world in purely racial terms'.⁴⁸ In reaction to Oliver's (played by Mo Sesay, a black West Indian) confession that his Asian (Indian) girlfriend Hashida (Sarita Khajuria) is pregnant by him, he suggests that Oliver leave her. 'Fusion is confusion' Oliver's friend claims, thus propagating a politics of difference which advocates racial separatism.

In 1915 Djuna Barnes's satirical sketch of Greenwich Village [entitled 'Greenwich Village, as it is'] appeared in *Pearson's Magazine*. Barnes was at the time a prolific and widely published journalist, an observer of New York life which she described as follows:

On every corner you can see a new type; but strange to say, no Americans are to be discovered anywhere. New York is the meeting place of the peoples, the only city where you can hardly find a typical American.⁴⁹

What was true for 1916 is even more appropriate to the contemporary urban landscape of the metropolitan centres in the West. Indeed, contemporary western metropolitan centres have become hybrid spaces

⁴⁸ Djuna Barnes, *Greenwich Village as it is* in Liz Heron (ed.), *City Women: Stories of the World's Great Cities* (Boston: Beacon Press 1993) p. 30

of class, ethnicity, nationality and internationality. As Saskia Sassen suggests:

A walk through almost any of today's large modern cities in Western Europe or the U.S. leaves one with the impression that each contains many cities. the corporate city of high-rise office buildings, the old, dying industrial city and the immigrant city. It is a space of power, a space of labour and machines, and a Third World space. Are they indeed three separate cities, each belonging to a different historico/geographic phase? Or do they presuppose each other – the existence of one, a condition for the other? If so, what is the nature of the dynamic that connects them?⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Saskia Sassen *Rebuilding the global city economy ethnicity and space* *Social Justice* vol 20 nos 3-4 (1993) p. 32

Arif Dirlik notes that.

Third Worlds have appeared in the First World and First Worlds in the Third. New diasporas have relocated the Self there and the Other here, and consequently borders and boundaries have been confounded. And the flow of culture has been at once homogenizing and heterogenizing, some groups share in common global culture regardless of location even as they are alienated from the culture of their hinterlands while others are driven back into cultural legacies long thought to be residual to take refuge in cultural havens that are as far apart from one another as they were at the origins of modernity – even though they may be watching the same TV shows.⁵¹

⁵¹ Dirlik *The postcolonial aura* pp. 352-3

One of the responses to massive postmodern deterritorialization is exemplified, according to Appadurai, in the cultural and sociospatial transformation of Latino and Asian sections of various large US cities into ethnic neighbourhoods such as 'Little Havana' and 'Koreatown'. World cities have thus become hybrid sites of real and imaginary travel. The growth of post World War II world cities, those megacities which attract global migration that both 'internationalize' and 'ethnicize' them, is part of a larger process. Currently the world scene is dominated by two simultaneous but contradictory processes: the rise of particularisms on one hand and universalism in the form of growing globalization on the other.⁵²

⁵² For a further discussion of this issue see Chantal Mouffe. For a politics of nomadic identity in George Robertson et al (eds) *Travellers Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London: Routledge 1994) pp. 105-13

The Other side of travel and television

Viewing television in terms of travel insists that liminality and hybridity cannot be ignored, but must be taken for what they are: a new political and cultural reality which demands new ways of conceptualizing postmodern society's institutions of representation and mediation. This new conceptualization seems to suggest the redemption of the emerging global public sphere from cultural essentialism, not to mention cultural imperialism.

Yet neither is using the travel metaphor to conceptualize the newly emergent global television culture free of ideological bias. Indeed, many of the problems associated with tourism (as a form of voluntary travel) can effectively be applied to the travelling culture produced by global television. In tourism research, 'a further stimulant to research has been the negative reactions to tourism on the part of the Third-World host peoples themselves'.⁵³ These reactions have been echoed at all levels of the multi-disciplinary spectrum of tourism research. In anthropology, for example, anthropologists began to see the tourist, like the conqueror, the governor or missionary, 'as the agent of contact between cultures and, directly or indirectly, the cause of change particularly in the less developed regions of the world'.⁵⁴ As the initial anthropological interest in tourism was closely linked to a more general interest in culture contact and its influences, tourism came to be seen as 'involving transactions between hosts and guests with consequences particularly for hosts in the Third World'.⁵⁵ This emerging awareness in anthropology emphasized the problem of ethnocentrism and its western-oriented bias and created the 'new ethnography'. The reflexivity of the 'new ethnography' is a reaction to the question, 'How have anthropological writings constructed or perpetuated myths about the non-Western Other?'.⁵⁶ The fundamental goal of the new ethnography is 'to apprehend and inscribe "others" in such a way as not to deny or diffuse their claims to subjecthood'.⁵⁷ Issues of tourism and colonialism have been articulated, even more critically, within the framework of political science.

Groups who have questioned the value of tourism to developing countries have raised the central question of politics as posed by Lasswell (1936) '... Who Gets What, When, How? ... Is international mass tourism to the Third World just another version of the plantation system under colonialism, with benefits accruing primarily to metropolitan parties? It is precisely this question and related ones that have led some individuals and radical organizations to view *tourism as whorism*'.⁵⁸

In the framework of sociology, tourism became identified as a form of imperialism or metropolitan dominance in a neo-colonial setting, 'in which the natives, particularly of Third World countries, are systematically exploited'.⁵⁹

The problematics associated with the application of the travel metaphor to television is even more serious from a feminist point of view. Any attempt to 'romanticize' travel should take into account the historically and culturally differential rates of geographical mobility between men and women in space, as well as the right – or lack of right – of women to leave their traditional place in the patriarchal domestic sphere to enter the public sphere. The economy of travel is embedded with the gender paradigms of the journey in the western male consciousness.⁶⁰ In the global culture of tourism, as Lisa Malkki

⁵³ Nelson H. H. Graburn and Jafar Jafari, 'Introduction: tourism, social science', *Annals of Tourism Research* vol. 18 no. 1 (1991), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Dennison Nash and Valene L. Smith, 'Anthropology and tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* vol. 18 no. 1 (1991), p. 13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 15.

⁵⁶ Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, 'The postmodernist turn in anthropology: cautions from a feminist perspective', *Signs* vol. 15 no. 1 (1989), p. 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 12.

⁵⁸ Harry G. Matthews and Linda K. Richter, 'Political science and tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* vol. 18 no. 1 (1991), p. 131.

⁵⁹ Graham Dann and Erik Cohen, 'Sociology and tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* vol. 18 no. 1 (1991), pp. 162–3.

⁶⁰ For an excellent feminist critique of this issue see Wolff, 'On the road again'.

61 Malkki: Citizens of humanity
p. 51

62 John Urry *The Tourist Gaze*
Leisure and Travel in
Contemporary Societies (London:
Sage Publications 1990) p. 141
Mary Morris says that 'While
there were such intrepid lady
travellers of the Victorian era
as Isabella Bird, Freya Stark and
Mary Kingsley they were
considered eccentric though the
best of them were gifted,
acclaimed writers (still
underrated today)' She adds
that 'Historically the popular
impression was that to journey
meant to put oneself at risk not
only physically but morally. The
language of sexual initiation is
oddly similar to that of travel.
We speak of sexual exploits or
adventures'. Both body and
globe are objects for exploration
and the great 'explorers',
whether Marco Polo or Don
Juan have been men. Mary
Morris, 'Women and travel', *Ms*
(May–June 1992), p. 68. See
also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial*
Eyes: Travel Writing and
Transculturation (London:
Routledge, 1992) and the book
review by James Clifford in *TLS*
11 September 1992, pp. 3–4

63 Van Den Abeele, *Travel as*
Metaphor p. xxv

64 Clifford, *Traveling cultures*
p. 103

observes, 'the hierarchical metaphors are often more sexual than generational. There are, for instance, strong tendencies to see the tourist as male and the destination as female'.⁶¹ Moreover, as John Urry points out, until the nineteenth century access to travel was largely the preserve of men. But this changed with the development of Victorian lady travellers, some of whom visited countries considered at the time to be uncivilized and uncharted.⁶²

While there is nothing inherently or essentially masculine about travel, the economy of travel is dominated by the phallocentric 'law of the home' (*oikonomia*) which 'organizes a set of gender determinations'. George Van Den Abeele observes that one need go no further than the 'prototypical travel narrative that is the *Odyssey* to find a modelling of the sexual division of labour: the domestic(ated) woman, Penelope, maintains the property of the home against would-be usurpers while her husband wanders about'.⁶³

Yet, it can be argued that television, the new public sphere of electronic globalism, has the emancipatory potential to symbolically liberate women from their 'real' confining domestic sphere by displacing it with the 'symbolic/imaginary' sphere of televisual globalism. James Clifford brings Victor Turner's ethnographic work among female Japanese factory women as an example of ethnographic informants who can be considered as travellers although they 'have not travelled, by any standard definition'. These women do watch television, they do have a local/global sense and 'they don't simply enact a culture'.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, it can still be claimed that this sense of globalism generated by television only promotes the illusion of travel. Television, in this respect, functions like the Hollywood melodrama (and in particular the woman's film): it gives women the illusion of escaping from an imaginary home while confining them to the real one.

The centrality of images in postmodern society, and their significant role in the cultural production and construction of difference, is part of the legacy embedded in western tradition since the early encounters of the West with others. The increasing global preoccupation with issues of 'particularism' and diversity related to multiculturalism and national/ethnic/racial and cultural identity is both reflected in, and projected by, television as one of the major global forces projecting postcolonial attitudes. The more positive view of globalization might see our period as a postmodern variation on the Hellenistic period (323–31 BC), which, we recall, was an international, cosmopolitan age. Commercial contacts were widespread and peoples of many ethnic and religious backgrounds merged in populous urban centres. In this milieu, advances were made in various fields of scientific inquiry, including engineering, physics, astronomy and mathematics. The more critical view of globalization will remind us that much of the Hellenistic period's material prosperity and cultural achievements were based on colonization and a slave economy.

Moving images: on travelling film and video

JOHN WELCHMAN

1 Fagin's four major video works perhaps not widely known in the UK, have been shown at the Whitney Biennale, and at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in a retrospective in 1993, as well as at festivals and academic venues in the USA and Europe. These pieces combine ceaseless wit and invention, complex forms of political engagement, visual irony, and technical inventiveness with investigations of gender and ethnic identities and First and Third-World powers.

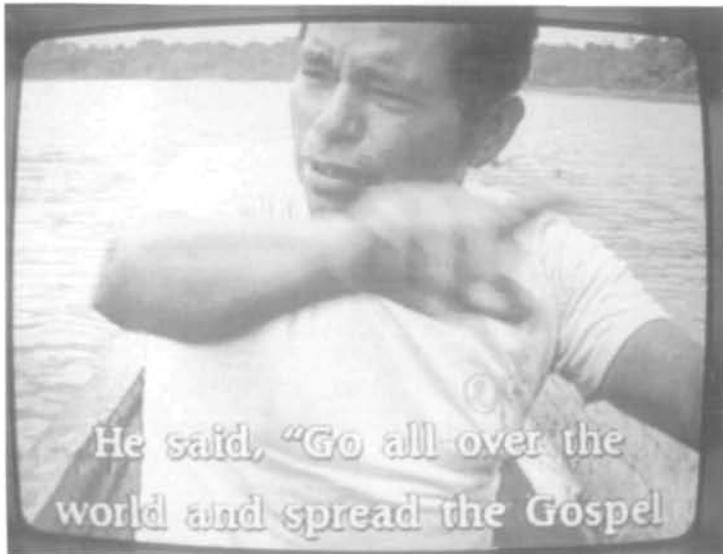
Commentary on Fagin's work includes a revealing interview with Peter Wollen in *October* magazine ('An Interview with Steve Fagin', *October* no. 41 [Summer 1987]), discussion in *Camera Obscura* (Vivian Sobchack, 'The Occidental Tourist', *Camera Obscura* no. 24 [October 1991]), and Patricia Mellencamp's *High Anxiety, Catastrophe, Scandal, Age and Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992). Duke University Press will be publishing a collection of these and other writings and images in 1997.

Sketches

Zero Degrees Latitude (1993), Steve Fagin's most recent video, begins with a camera hovering over an old-style map of the Americas, written with pseudo-archaic calligraphy. We zoom in on the equator as it passes through Ecuador. The tape transports us to this place, posing as its central question the issue of going, and examining the cultural remainders of western missionaries who went before.¹ The map is not an allegory, or at least, not quite. Fagin is a maker and surveyor of maps, but his are maps spun together from travel machines, visual codes, and a roll-call of fragrant travellers, connoisseurs of displacement, and virtual mountaineers.

Fagin's first video, *Virtual Play: the Double Direct Monkey Wrench in Black's Machinery* (1984) offered a remarkable relocation into the life of Lou-Andreas Salomé, a psychoanalyst, dreamer, lover and an obsession for many of the great 'men of the mind' in the early twentieth century. It was followed by *The Amazing Voyage of Gustave Flaubert and Raymond Roussel* (1986), an imaginary video quest undertaken by Flaubert and Roussel, woven together from letters, diaries, and real and imaginary bodies. *The Machine That Killed Bad People* (1990) reflects on the Marcos regime in the Philippines by feeding back refreshed ideas of documentary, violence, catastrophe and the spaces of privileged private lives against the dominant codes of television news.

Zero Degrees Latitude supplements these discussions with vérité-style glimpses of the ongoing effects of religious proselytization in Ecuador – looking back to the activities of the Summer Institute of Linguistics from the late 1950s to the 1980s. Questioning the conditions of the relationship between North and South, the piece enfolds one of Fagin's great leaps of imaginative space, opposing the quasi-documentary footage shot in the Ecuadorian highlands with an extraordinary psycho-sculptural machine supplied with a vocal



Zero Degrees Latitude (Steve Fagin, 1993). Distributed by Drift Productions, New York.

Zero Degrees Latitude (Steve Fagin, 1993). Distributed by Drift Productions, New York.



armature in the form of a floating missionary voice. The contraption simultaneously incubates, explodes and entraps the woman inside it – in an epiphany of conscience, guilt and desire. *Zero Degrees* asks: what is development and how is it experienced?; how do missionary actions control, inflect, empower or destroy the lives of local people?; what happens to local imaginations under the monopoly spiritual capital of the Christian scriptures?; finally, what latitudes are there in the zero degree?

Fagin is always mapping, making space, listening to it; he is coiled up around it. Just as there are cartographic connectivities suggested in our *fin-de-siècle* teleogeographies, in non-western spirit-worlds and among the written-down trade winds represented by the adventure-colonists, so Fagin gives and takes his video-spaces, with spirit and virtuality, adventure and social inscription, so that they are always spaces making meanings, place part-objects that simultaneously refer to and refuse an assemblage of 'bigger pictures'.² Fagin's maps stack up like a 'magic encyclopedia' of travels (the phrase is Walter Benjamin's, ventured in relation to the folds, layers and epiphanies of his library)³ – of removes and displacements. Their leading figure is the 'amazing voyage'. But his voyages (and amazements) are of many kinds, spaced out in the post-hallucinogenic world beyond the magical mystery tour, where they are aligned in three merging experiences: literary travel, ethnographic travel and cinematic travel. Some of these goings are oneiric or imaginary, done in rooms with the blinds down (like Roussel); some follow the move across missionary positions, or media displacements; others shunt to and fro inside the brackets of language, or under the cover of travel surrogates like photographs, movies and television.

We see travelling television, video-on-the-road, home-made runarounds, and Flaubertian escapades in which visual delicacies

2 For a wide-ranging discussion of the political, symbolic and social relativity of maps see Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York, Guilford Press, 1992). I am here indebted to pp. 194–5 of this discussion.

3 See Walter Benjamin 'Unpacking my library: a talk about book collecting', in *Illuminations*, trans. and ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, Schocken Books, 1969), p. 60.

substitute for the writer's sonorous periods, even passages of modified exotica (as in the Ecuadorian Amazon) There is studio travel in which the prop and the backdrop substitute for places and bring them wildly home, and editorial travel of unimaginable splices and mergers There is the lustful, dusty stasis of archival travel; and the moral travel of purpose and commitment. All are driven forward by a percussive assemblage of machines of travel. We recall the chamber-bound Tinguely-esque confection that stomps forward by the inch in the studio sequence of *Zero Degrees Latitude*, and the intimate-text/fragrant-image machine of the postcard. Or, think of the satellite Trojan Horse of television, whose minor-face is neither quite perspectival nor just a black and white surface system, but a jukebox of Poppy colours and struggling, little dimensions Think, again, of the real-delusional travel of the dream; and the vectoring machines of the walk, the run, the pursuit, the drive, the crossing, and the flight

All these are driven forward under the parallel time harness of genres and codes: the real-space, probe-time of the documentary, where the camera is taken in, lofted into an 'authentic' site. We are in a breakwater, or on a hill walk, where it enframes the candid explosions of a religious physiognomy The throw-up, throw-away loop of verite, the soliloquy, and the voiceover, are the personae of Fagin's hyphenated generic miscegenation

Then, there are the codes of travel itself, and Fagin depends on them and rips them off in equal measure. For he tilts against the grandiosity of the odyssey, the bigotry of the pilgrimage, the picturesque voyeurism of the tour, the inconsequentiality of the strolling *flaneur*, the abstract mission of the adventurer, the un-magic encyclopaedism of the ethnographer, the terror of the runaway, the bar codes of the reporter, the grandstanding of modern aerialists (the pilot, the balloonist, the cosmonaut), the banality of the commuter, and the contra-sensuality of virtual travel (by the hacker, or the cyber-surfer).

And the travellers, the crew of persons (verifiable, invented, found and imagined) that inhabit mondo Fagin. We meet a guest list of circa-end-of-the-century voyagers, including Gustave Flaubert, Roussel, Lou Andreas Salomé, Rimbaud, Walter Benjamin, Jules Verne and Pierre Loti. These negotiants with the onset of the twentieth century meet with a more generic cast of mildly millennial types obliviously living out its opposite end: television reporters, CIA operatives, presidential entourages, missionary zealots, camera operators, a young woman lost in the jungle.

Travelling (video) cultures

Using Fagin's work as a point of departure, and joining it with other projects – different and related – I want to ask how can we speak to, and in what contexts can we locate, *moving images* – representations

of cultural movement? Wider issues in this discussion would include the relations developed between Hollywood as an image-home and its various extensions on 'location', the camera as a technology of retrieval – bringing images back; and the many related questions caught up in the representational imperialism of film as it reins the world in (from Vertov's *kino-eye* to the *National Geographic* documentary and beyond). While I will venture briefly into some of these discussions, I want to privilege one aspect of the broader debate suggested in Fagin's work – the idea of 'travelling video' – activities of moving-image production which make and imagine movement, relocations, migrations, translations, the flows of information, the projections of fantasy, the hard 'realities' of location, the vicissitudes of the voyage, the stubbornness of adventure? How can we mark a space for representing or ordering *the moves* (to insist on their specificity and plurality)?

There is much to move around. For we should not be unaccountably obsessed with the strictures of location or the prophetic immanence of 'dwelling' (of which Heidegger has become the Poet and Master).⁴ Nor should we succumb to the different inertia arising from the logic of a postcolonial morality which sometimes refuses the possibilities, empowerments and pleasures of moves – whether by selves, others, or the others of others. The refusal of encounter is not a solution to the problem posed by 'forced locations', by encounters with no account, by repositions that are blind to their motivations, consequences or disruptions. The problem is in moving itself.

Travel is always, simultaneously, a transgression and a surrender. It is always marked by desires and needs. It is always a rupture formed of several violences to place: the separation or splitting off from 'home'; the vector or passage between, or through, and the continuous intrusion of arrivals. A 'travelling video' would take place in an arena whose outsides are made up of travesties of *the moves*: the immanence of dwelling, the morality of localism, the imaginary fissions of pure 'flow', the vertigo of transgressive surrender, and the perverse ambition to 'represent'. As a way to negotiate with these exteriors, I want to suggest that the videos of Steve Fagin and a small number of fellow travellers – while often, perhaps necessarily, getting caught on the ropes of all these demarcations – have, nevertheless, struggled with unusual passion and energy to move away from their confinements to image conditions inside the arena.

This 'inside' is dense and compacted. Not that Fagin produces precious or hallowed objects of displacement (as in some aesthetic, 'installational' *moves* developed in the artworld). Rather, a primary consequence of his weave of moving images is that its complexities and folds, its structures of reference and provisional asides, its dialogues and diversities, will confound the partial and reductive allocations of a critical narrative, just as they might saturate or overflow particular spectatorial horizons. There is a kind of sumptuary

⁴ See especially Martin Heidegger Building dwelling thinking in *Poetry Language Thought* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 142–61. Here he writes, for example that 'To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations' (p. 157).

risk in this plurality, for even as the running-on of references is multiplied to excess, as they move apart and together in serial sequence and metaphoric overlay, their hatching and warp might open too many little depths, puncture too many apertures-for-knowing in the little box of sound and light where video comes from

The following remarks will suggest some of the ways in which Fagin and company have staged and overcome this risk; how they have balanced profusion and restraint, heres and theres, dreams and ideologies – how they have produced a vision of *the moves*. I will draw this work alongside various understandings of relocation and ‘travel’ as they have been played out in three recent discussions and sites of production: in so-called ‘postmodern’ anthropologies (especially in the new ‘visual anthropologies’), in aspects of postwar film and experimental video, and (briefly) in the artworld. In conclusion I will suggest how their visualizations of encounter produce what I want to describe as a kind of ‘post-physiognomy’ of place.

A ‘travelling video’, then, might pass by a similar range of incitements, revisions, old dangers, new pleasures and recontested politics as those confronted in what James Clifford has described as ‘traveling cultures’.⁵ Clifford argues that such cultures have arisen in relation to a number of ‘travel conjunctures’ focused on the transition from anthropological ‘informants’ to ‘hybridized’, postmodern counter-travellers – those travelling in their own way and among their routes (which might include ours), who are encountered (on the way) by the sense-making machines of ‘advanced’ anthropologies. The transition is predicated on a shift from informants and static research, to participant observation (after Malinovsky) – a sort of dignified getting down with the natives, which went on to include the technics of living and language immersion (like a second baptism into the new life of the other culture). But participant observation itself still offered a form of ‘co-residency’ rather than travel, one in which the anthropologist (who might also be a filmmaker, and would almost certainly be a photographer or draughtsperson) sought a one-way exchange of homes with the native settlement – an exchange based on the anthropologist moving in for long periods, probably uninvited and usually unannounced. Such behaviour, of course, has no reciprocal issue in the West, it being – for the most part – quite inconceivable that even a family member could stay in western-style domestic space for months or years without mutual negotiation or clearly specified invitation.

The place of classical anthropology is thought by Clifford as one of the sides that rope off his mobile arena of travelling cultures: for ‘fieldwork’ must be understood ‘as a special kind of localized *dwelling*’ undertaken by ‘homebodies abroad’ (p. 99) who invest in complex imaginary relations to local languages, rituals, everyday life which they *observe*. The vectors and machines of travel are ignored in

⁵ James Clifford Traveling cultures in Lawrence Grossberg Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies* (London Routledge 1992) pp. 96–116 Future page references to this are given in the text

this account, capital cities and national contexts erased, and the originary home of the researcher, and the many sites and operations of translation (mostly between languages, but also between customs, manners, religions), forgotten or marginalized. The control system of the anthropological experiment is thus incubated from the contaminants of social and political context – either local, national or global (in respect of the peoples/places involved)

Searching for a renegotiation of this problem, Clifford suggests that the people who used to be positioned as 'informants' might instead be seen to write and travel culture back. The new anthropology turns home truths into away provisions. It looks, for example, at beaches, shores and interiors, not as autonomous islands, or cut-out communities, it affirms the multiple authorship of other cultures, and not their definitional reduction to a singular ethnographic trait or dominant language group. It will encounter conflict and non-consensuality, rather than smooth its results into a homogeneous form of cumulative pronouncement

As we will see with the emergence of a discourse of visual anthropology, Fagin's position in relation to the representation of travelling cultures is neither illustrative nor instrumental. That is, his videos cannot simply be inscribed within the new anthropologies, or even – more abstractly – within their transdisciplinary paradigms. Yet they clearly cut across the suggestions, desires and the investments of such para-academic discourses. Their location, if you like, is to travel through the materialized thought of travelling cultures, being only what anthropology has never been, even in its newly imagined future. A measure of this virtual intersection is found in the places in Clifford's text where the possibilities of travelling cultures are imagined in the form of projects, itemizations of parentheses. One of his roll-calls of specific subject positions usually marginal to the concerns of anthropology reads like a cross-over cast list from Fagin's *Zero Degrees Latitude*: 'missionaries, converts, literate or educated informants, mixed bloods, translators, ethnographers, pilgrims . . .' (p. 101) With the single – and notable – exception of ethnographers themselves (who do, in fact, have an offstage presence in the piece) these are the people seen, encountered, interviewed, researched, simulated, imagined and videoed in Fagin's most recent work. It is thus that his representations might find a provisional definition as one of the 'new representational strategies' or 'notes for ways of looking at culture (along with tradition and identity) in terms of travel relations' (p. 101), that Clifford recommends. While Clifford's discussion goes on to privilege (though also to problematize) the category of 'ex-centric natives', or 'travelling "indigenous" culture-makers', Fagin is more concerned with the ways that cultures are travelled to and around – both historically and televisualy – and how these representations circulate, and are exchanged and overlaid.

It is significant that in thinking through these representational

6 See James Clifford in James Clifford and George E Marcus (eds) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1986)

7 Basil Wright *The Long View* (New York: Knopf 1974) p. 502

8 The fullest account of Jean Rouch's ethnographic film is in Paul Stoller *The Cinematic Griot: the Ethnography of Jean Rouch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 2, nos. 3-4 (1989) special issue on 'The cinema of Jean Rouch'

9 See Stoller *The Cinematic Griot* pp. 6-162

10 Ibid. see ch. 11 esp. p. 202

strategies Clifford begins not with postmodern anthropological *writing* (whose problematics and possible reformulations he has discussed elsewhere),⁶ but by addressing particular kinds of overlap between travelling cultures and filmic representation. His delivery of travelling cultures to the (privileged) threshold of cinema allows us to cross over into 'travelling film' and again to 'travelling video'. Clifford alludes to three positions, which considered together might form a matrix for the working-out of a critical travelling video. First, he outlines 'the story of dwelling-in-travel' located around the Moe family, a Hawaiian performing group, within whose migrations, he suggests, the possibility that a filmwork-in-progress about the family would be able to deploy excerpts from the 'home' (really 'road-home') movies made by travelling family member Tal Moe. Secondly, Clifford introduces a film by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, *Joe Leahy's Neighbours*, which follows the movements and hybrid sociality of a mixed-blood inhabitant ('the sort of figure who turns up in travel books, but seldom in ethnographies') of the New Guinea highlands. He turns, finally, to a historical antecedent of travelling film in the ethnographic *verte* of Jean Rouch, noting in particular his *Jaguar* (1953-67), which unfolds as a journey between Mali and the Gold Coast in West Africa, 'a wild, picaresque swoop through Francophone Africa',⁷ an 'ethno-fiction' of 'social change and displacement' narrated and 'performed' by three young Songhay men.

In the touching of film and ethnography the work of Rouch makes a crucial gesture – both historically and critically.⁸ An autodidact who conjugated the moving image with aspects of later surrealism and the camera-eye theories of Dziga Vertov, Rouch produced a 'participatory cinema' in which – most obviously in the films of migration and travel, including *Jaguar* and *Moi un Noir* (about a dock-worker in the Ivory Coast port of Abijan) – the maker would embark on an interactive journey with the film's subjects. He would record found situations by improvisational means. And it is in this sense that he has been seen by his sympathetic critics as a 'cinematic griot', as a participant anthropologist who finally 'became part of contemporary Songhay cosmology', but equally as a maker of images who merged with his camera in a moment of epiphanic unity that somehow answered to the native rituals of 'possession' which obsessed him.⁹ In this reading, Rouch is made over as a 'radical empiricist for whom lived experience is a primary component of fieldwork', and whose visionary-real camera actions constituted a kind of sympathetic magic, or 'artistic anthropology' actually capable of solving 'ethnographic mysteries'.¹⁰

Such devotions have the merit, at least, of showing how Rouch stands at the apogee of the ethnographic tradition of 'participation' – becoming a borderline subject of his places of relocation – yet at the same time they clearly reveal that Rouch's substitution of co-production for 'participation' transgressed the disciplinary bounds

and counter-interactive moralities that still dominate the pursuit of academic, and even 'para-', anthropologies. The relatively recent history of 'visual anthropology' – for which Rouch's films constitute a favoured set of representations, though not always uncritically – is a case in point. Most of the earlier accounts of ethnographic film establish, or subscribe to, rigid exclusionary models that proscribe clear bounds and limits in the specific and privileged association of 'scientific' ethnography and film. Karl Heider, for example, launches a categorical defence of 'ethnographic integrity' from which all 'errors' of 'cinematic aesthetic' are refused or purged. Ethnographic film must dissociate itself from 'jump-cuts' and 'subjectivity'; it must zealously pursue an utter minimization of anthropological 'presence', and it must indulge in no 'artifice' of any kind – it must have nothing at all to do with the bastard lineage of 'Flaherty's igloo'.¹¹

Departing from this purist position, much of the subsequent debate in the emergence of visual anthropology has been variously preoccupied with sullying the transparency of the ethno-filmic image, engaging on the way, little by little, developments in 1970s and 1980s film theory, Derridean-influenced spacings between visuality and textuality, and a whole range of renegotiations with modernist and colonialist authority collected from the endgame of postmodern and postcolonial theory.

Here, again, the work of Rouch marks a necessary moment of pause in the recent call, purportedly taken up – or exemplified – in the very different projects of Robert Gardner and Trinh T. Minh-ha, for a 'move within anthropology from representation to evocation'.¹² This call, and other, 'progressive' suggestions from younger anthropologists concerned with the visual field, often seems both to leap too far (into the celebrated unknowability of the poetic) and to fall too short. Crudely put, the problem is one of *combinations* and multiplicities (though emphatically *not* of the surrender to them, nor of any abandonment to some postmodern euphoria of exchange).

A line of postures between the too-much of the poetic and the too-little of anthropological stricture, is another measure of the profuse balance achieved in Fagin's work. For, in a sense, Fagin's videos are stacked like dream-works in the unconscious of even the more radical exponents of visual anthropology, from which – somewhat in the manner of Clifford's text – they occasionally escape in the compressed form of lists and slips and asides. In this condition they are what is desired but never quite stated; or, alternatively, what is thought but never quite produced. It soon becomes clear that Fagin has worked like a video-spider making webs from the little catalogues and possibility strings that Clifford and others have built into a tentative pocket Larousse of 'travelling cultures'.

One of the corners thus webbed over is the place of historical travel and its kinds, how histories of movement (migrations, evacuations, tourism, adventure, emergencies, refugeeism, pilgrimage and so on)

¹¹ See Karl Heider *Ethnographic Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1976). Flaherty's igloo is a reference to the home-improvement sanctioned by Robert Flaherty when he had an igloo artificially enlarged during the shooting of *Nanook of the North* so that he would have room to film the domestic activities inside.

¹² See Peter Ian Crawford, Film as discourse: the invention of anthropological realities in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds) *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1992).

are invoked, and how they merge and interfere with the structures and experiences of 'home' in the present, when, and if, there is one. In another little list – of 'letters, diaries, oral history, music and performance traditions' (p. 107), Clifford opens a fresh parenthesis onto the supporting discourses and resources of travelling knowledge and confession that fed into Fagin's earlier videos which dealt with the historical literary travellers, Flaubert and Roussel.

Zero Degrees Latitude, even through its title, speaks to the perils of diminishing return as visual anthropology thinks the dangerous question of correlation between 'documentary' and 'fiction'. As Dai Vaughan puts it: 'some people would argue that any distinction between documentary and fiction diminishes rapidly to zero as film increases in complexity'.¹³ *Zero Degrees Latitude* offers an ironic allegory of the zero complexity in the question of latitude and reach between site, archive and imagination.¹⁴ In this condition it forms a dialogue with the carefully thought attempts by Trinh T. Minh-ha to negotiate between the possibilities (and demands) of 'documentary' and 'fiction', not by making recourse to conventional antagonisms ('being merely "anti-"'), but by questioning the 'specialized, professionalized "censorship" generated by conventions'. This results not in the denial or negation of such 'categories and approaches', but rather in an 'extension' of their reach in projects that continuously work at their limits or edged.¹⁵ Moving through what Judith Mayne refers to as this 'resistance to categorization',¹⁶ and Trinh T. Minh-ha herself describes as a 'desire not to simply mean', she underlines a commitment to 'stories, songs, music, proverbs, as well as people's daily interactions'.¹⁷ Such 'stories' include western writers (such as Bachelard, Cixous, Heidegger and Eluard), as well as local traditions: 'for the place of hybridity is also the place of my identity'.¹⁸ As Benjamin argued of his project on Moscow, there is an effort here to put 'theory' in a kind of vivid suspension within and around the processes of travelling-writing-(filming). It is not, and cannot ever be, forgotten, but, equally, it is never a privileged 'safe place' of pronouncement separated from experience – or confusion.

¹³ Dai Vaughan *The aesthetics of ambiguity*, in Crawford and Turton (eds) *Film as Ethnography* p 105

¹⁴ For a discussion of the relation between anthropology and fiction film in India see K N Salay 'Visual anthropology and Indian fiction films' *Journal of Social Research*, vol 29, no 2 (1986) pp 1-41

¹⁵ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge 1992) Professional censorship', interview with Rob Stephenson *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 19 (Fall-Winter 1987-8) pp 217-18

¹⁶ Trinh T. Minh-ha 'From a hybrid place' interview with Judith Mayne in *Woman Native, Other Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p 137

¹⁷ Ibid p 148

¹⁸ Minh-ha *Film as Translation* interview with Scott MacDonald in *Woman Native Other* p 129 In *Naked Spaces* the soundtrack of three differentiated females voices offers a triple register of commentary – local/ traditional personal and voices imbued with western logic. See pp 127ff

Filmic home-bodies and counter-travelling selves

These locations within and around the theory-practice represented in some postmodern ethnographies, or the recent and progressively more persuasive discussions developed in 'visual anthropology', speak only to one particular intersection of travelling film and video. As we begin to think through other connections and refusals, a series of projects is revealed whose sites between contemporary developments in the cultural politics of the artworld, experimental film and video, cultural, postcolonial and gender studies stand as one of the most intricately formatted assemblages in recent practice. As each weave is measured

and tied, very little is given away or assumed without being closely thought through among the many levels of film-video production – script, location, theory, performance, historical context, editing, sound, and screening and reception (to abbreviate).

The place of these formats, their scales and redemptions, might also be posed in relation both to canonical and experimental film or video traditions. Again, the question of 'travel', as problematized by Clifford and others, provides a point of entry. For it is not only traditional anthropology that 'has privileged relations of dwelling over relations of travel'.¹⁹ Variously formulated investments in the static conditions of 'home', 'dwelling' and 'origin' have also marked film production in the postwar years in ways that are instructive for any consideration of *the moves*.

How, then, can we think the place of travelling video in relation to cinemas that take on, or passively contest, the effects of moves and displacement? This question needs more consideration than is possible here, but I want to offer a few points of departure. Travelling video, and Fagin's work in particular, is clearly remote from the quasi-allegorical, historic-montage of D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) or later, epic, reconstructions of all-world narrative legends in Hollywood drag. But it also looks and sounds against the interiorizing closures loaded into mainstream and experimental film, from the postwar US comedies of 'social relevance' to Woody Allen; from Antonioni's colourfully decomposed suburbs to Fellini's Italian labyrinths of home, from the interiorites of John Cassavetes's *Faces* (1968), or Aleksandr Sokurov's nineteenth-century Russian interior-city, to the in-your-face closure of Michael Snow's loft.

Of several instructive possibilities, the comparison with Federico Fellini is especially revealing. For among Fellini's films, and in his miscellaneous commentaries on and around them, we encounter a summa of previous investments in the conditions of 'home', national identity, domestic tourism and the contra-travelling self that mark the limit term antitheses to Fagin's hybrid relocationism. Such vigorous attachment to location and origin is by no means an exclusive characteristic of the co-production Italy-Fellini-character-auteur. It marks the works of Antonioni, Cassavetes, Bergman and other new-wave filmmakers in the 1960s, and it extends the long history of modernist disquisition of the postures, anxieties and dilemmas of the alienated modern self.

In the 'family-centred, domestic, work-a-day world' inhabited by Cassavetes's obsessively scrutinized protagonists, local, interior space seethes with endless permutations. As Raymond Carney puts it, 'there is nowhere to run to' outside the hard-ended parentheses of constant emotional adjustment: for 'if characters run off to construct and temporarily inhabit imaginative worlds, "worlds elsewhere", they and their creators only care about experience insofar as it can be brought back home to those who stay at home. That the American sublime can

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 99

²⁰ Raymond Carney *American Dreaming: the Films of John Cassavetes and the American Experience* (Berkeley University of California Press 1985) p. 301

be domesticated is indeed the dream of America.²⁰ Here, even other worlds that are 'imaginative' and 'temporary' cannot be grasped by a neo-sublime subtracted from the landscape and the outside only to be reconvened around a suburban dining-room table.

Antonioni offers us a more literal view of the lost cartography of elsewhere. In *Red Desert* (1964), Giuliana sits on the floor at the height of her obsessions, with a map of South America (showing Patagonia) on her lap: 'Who knows', she laments, 'if there's a place in the world where we would be better off.' The map slips. And the globe dissolves; for the only non-suburban territories that unfold are dreamscapes of distraction, social dismemberment and placelessness. Places that are only memories or desires, the middle-class evaporation of the social necessities of emigration, the modernist obsession with the labyrinth of the inner self, and isolated, ego-centred voyaging – all are remaindered in Antonioni's lusciously painted cuticles of film as the map of somewhere else falls away.

With Fellini, that which simply slips and fades is radically disabused. For he is the engineer of a face-travel-machine whose interiority is the obsessional obverse of Fagin's physiognomy of relocation and cultural encounter. Fellini is emphatically not a traveller, in film or in life:

I dislike travelling, and am ill at ease on journeys. In Italy, I can manage it: curiosity is aroused, I know what there is behind all those faces, voices, places. But when I'm abroad this bores me: I no longer know what anything means, I can no longer make anything out, I feel excluded.

All the same, there is always an atmosphere of travel around me. Arrivals and departures, farewells and welcomes. I love this movement around me.

My friends are fellow travellers²¹

In a condition where the non-travelling subject is orbited by surrogate satellite travellers, we traverse a Fellini-centric universe that circles around the xenophobic imaginary of the creative artist. While he adores local transport (especially trams and bicycles) Fellini cannot endure the thought and experience of international transit: for such movement is discomforting, alienating, difficult, obscure and exclusionary. Travel's trouble is that it gives rise to situations which contradict ordinary experience; the face-to-faces it envisages are blank and empty because they are not formed in the bonds of identity, nor can they be satisfactorily controlled, manipulated or even adequately decoded by the privileged spectator who demands empowerment over them.

For Fellini, the film-man who wishes to 'penetrate – how shall I put it? – as a tourist without being involved',²² there are certain conditions the cinematic self, the 'ready-made' faces of character actors, memories, dreams and vivid epiphanies. Fellini will order these

²¹ Federico Fellini: Miscellany I – 'I'm a liar, but an honest one' in *Fellini on Fellini* trans. Isabel Quigley (London: Eyre Methuen 1976) pp. 53–4

²² Fellini: Rimini: my home town in *Fellini on Fellini* pp. 32–3

ingredients with the passionate abandonment of a syncopated tourist All the places in Fellini's filmic mind converge in the memory-driven, dreamscape present of his Italy, and the amniotic 'hovel of Theatre 5' at Cinecittà. 'whenever there I am protected from falling off the cliff by the capacious net consisting of my roots, my memories, my habits, my home: in sum by my laboratory'²³ Fellini knows only home-travel and imaginary home-style transit. He even distinguishes his incestuous intimacy with 'Italian reality' and its 'systems of representation, among newspapers, television, publicity, winks of an eye, and the syntheses of images common to us all' from the experience of middle-European *émigré* Jews, such as Milos Forman and Roman Polanski, who can 'absorb like vampires the history, culture, memories of others'.

Just as Fellini has his non-travelling companions who travel on his behalf simply by virtue of being with him, as we have already seen, Fagin also, though inversely, looks across to a small band of fellow-travellers (who are never quite there): Jean Rouch (in West Africa), Trinh T. Minh-ha (in Africa, China and Vietnam), Chantal Akerman (in Russia), Chris Marker (in Guinea Bisau, Siberia and Japan). His work makes perhaps its closest approach to Chris Marker's films, video-essays and fictional cine-novellas – from *Lettre de Sibérie* (1958) and *Sans Soleil* (1982) to *The Last Bolshevik* (1993). Both have made visual lacework with the old-style parameters of the voyage, explored the conditions of encounter with other places and the limits, pleasures, shocks and fantasies that attend the making and editing of moving images away from home

But Marker puts in something more and leaves out something that is rather less. Marker offers a more mannered performance of the symbolic self, emanating from a visual scene which is by turns oblique and definite. This 'less' or omission has several elements. It is underlined – like the poetic 'more' of visual anthropology – in Marker's suggestion that the image might be a *madeleine* – the dissolving memory-taste of Proust, even if this little bite is piqued with 'humility' and fragile 'power' as he also claims.²⁴ And it is written through Marker's clearly marked (if ambiguously performed) positions as the diarist, the narrator, the writer-poet, the activist and the 'founder, editor and writer' for *Éditions de Seul Planète*.²⁵

On the other hand there is a 'more' caught up in a web of fabrications which fictionalize the subject positions of the maker-Marker. These include exotic, invented, biographical details: Marker refers in one place to 'we Brazilians', and elsewhere to the 'we' who might have been born (for dramatic effect) in Ulan-Bator rather than a Parisian suburb. All these dispersed personae – with their ineffable origins and unflappable presents – are quite distinct (perhaps generationally so as much as anything else) from Fagin's measured non-interventionism of the self. The aura encoded in Marker's vague, sometimes ironic aggrandizements is entirely foreign to Fagin's

²³ Federico Fellini in Giovanni Graziani (ed.) *Comments on Film* trans. Joseph Henry (Fresno: The Press at California State University 1988) p. 115

²⁴ Chris Marker *Immemory proposal* (January 1994) p. 3 cited in Bill Horrigan *Another likeness in Chris Marker Silent Movie* (Wexner Center for the Arts 1995) p. 9

²⁵ A series of travelogues that blended impressionistic journalism with still photography' Museum of Modern Art Department of Film notes for Chris Marker *A Video Selection* p. 1

finesse-full dissociation from almost all visible or sounded (and, therefore, literal) self-inscription. Marker, in other words, simultaneously surrenders to the poetry of the other place, and reins himself back with an intrusive, confessional, believable, diary-documentary voice. As a result, his pieces are strangely, pleasurable but also easily sutured, joining together the imaging of intangible others and the *Fantastic Travels of Mandeville*, with a lyrical yet foot-firm, anecdotal, walk-and-talk-about 'I'. It is almost as if, as has been said of Rousseau (and we have seen of Fellini), 'places are so many figures of himself'.²⁶

²⁶ J B Pontalis cited in Georges Van Den Abbeele *Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 1992) p 120

Move

I want, finally, to shift discussion (and imagination) from Fellini's innate 'I' and national physiognomies, back in the direction I am claiming Fagin and a small company of others have already begun to move. Several contributions to questions of ethnography and the techniques and strategies of visualization – as well as the rethinking of anthropology at large in which Clifford has figured so prominently – can assist us. These include the work of image-makers and theorists who have worked in Australia, such as Eric Michaels²⁷ and David MacDougall. MacDougall, in particular, engages with the complicities of style that might attend an intertextual cinema. Such a cinema would traduce the monopoly values of older ethnographic film: it would speak to multiple voices in multiple cultures, and deploy multiple codes. In a gesture that runs in the opposite direction to the occasional film theory written or spoken by the 'anti-travelling' Fellini (for whom the face functions as his leading fetish of 'home', the dwelling place of national emotivity), MacDougall poses a series of restraints to western points of view fixed in the moving image, notably 'the assumption that characters will assert their personalities and desires visually, in ways that can be registered in close-ups of the face'.²⁸ This and related suggestions about the western encoding of the closeup, which have a theoretical point of origin in Béla Balász's emotive hyper-facialization of the filmic world,²⁹ offers a useful 'corrective', but it should not become a stricture. The films of Trinh T. Minh-ha show the way to a reimagination of western–non-western 'reassemblages' of the face.³⁰ While Fagin's videos suggest a different, but related, concern with the physiognomies of location

²⁷ Eric Michaels *Bad Aboriginal Art Tradition Media and Technological Horizons* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 1994)

²⁸ David MacDougall 'Complicities of Style' in Crawford and Turton (eds) *Film as Ethnography* p 94

²⁹ See Béla Balász *Theory of the Film Character and Growth of a New Art* trans Edith Bone (New York: Dover Publications 1970) especially ch. VII 'The Close up and ch. VIII 'The Face of Man'

³⁰ In the question of the representation of the faces of others Trinh T. Minh-ha has made an especially powerful intervention going so far as to reverse MacDougall's suggestions. Her films are in a special sense both centred and decentred on the envisioning particularizing fracturing and metaphoric relocation of faces a process that she foregrounds in the selection of stills that illustrate the film scripts and interviews in *Frame Framed* and the cover of her collection of critical writings *Woman Native Other*

To move from the reasonable suggestions of MacDougall to the videos of Steve Fagin is to move from the collision of 'two texts of life' (in MacDougall's terms) to interactions in a global – social space that are more desiring, more abstract and more layered. It is to move from the anxious influence system that flickers between 'texts' to the catastrophic encounter of discourses, or systems and clusters of flowing texts. Thus, *Zero Degrees Latitude* is inscribed across a hybrid

fusion of (local) religious world-views, merging evangelical Protestantism (overlaid with Cold War calculation), with a syncretic native Catholicism, and various local religious and 'animisms'.

It might be that Fagin would also fear MacDougall's fears the consequences of 'cultural relativity run wild' or 'mirrors within mirrors and unending nesting boxes', but such threats of signifying entrapment or abandon are for him an incitement to representation – just as they are recognized to be part-conditions of the unequal exchange between cultures, capital, and powers. As Trinh T. Minh-ha has shown, it is possible, and necessary, to make 'commitment from the mirror-writing box'.³¹ Though still 'amazing', the wandering sum of Fagin's travelling video does not make up a nomadology.³² It does not desire so much abstract subversion, and its multiple instances (codes, persons, histories, image-types) take the place of multiple theorizations. Fagin's discretionary universes of cross-cultured travel transform the stolid interiority of television's chamber into a rainbow net of movements. They are studies, or *ébauches*, that meet the as yet 'sketchy' demands for 'a comparative cultural studies approach to specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of dwelling and travelling'.³³

³¹ This phrase is the title of the first essay in Minh-ha's *Woman Native Other*.

³² This phrase is from Clifford's essay *Traveling cultures*. While I think I understand the motivation for what has become the quite generalized (almost always underspecified) demonization of a set of ideas developed most notably by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the two volumes of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* I would also suggest that there is much that is radical and challenging in this discussion. For a (now dated) summary of different formations of nomadological discourse (in anthropology) in literary travel writing and in critical theory see my column *Here there and otherwise* *Artforum* (January 1989).

³³ Clifford *Traveling cultures*
p. 108

The eyes of Nelly Kaplan

CHRIS HOLMLUND

1 Brief bio and filmographies of seventy women who have made films in France, Belgium and Switzerland between 1968 and 1987 can be found in Paula Lejeune, *Le cinéma des femmes* (Paris: Atlas Lherminier 1987). That so many women have been able to make feature films in France is primarily attributable to France's policy of *avances sur recettes* (advances on box office receipts).

2 Georgiana Colvile, *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles voient? Regards de Françaises à la caméra*, *French Review* vol 67 no. 1 (1993) pp 74-5. This and all subsequent translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

3 For an explanation of why so many French women intellectuals refuse to call themselves feminist see Alice A. Jardine and Anne M. Menke, Introduction in *Shifting Scenes: Interviews on Women Writing and Politics in Post-68 France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) pp 1-16.

4 On the absence of feminist film theory in France see further Monique Martineau, *Inconnu au bataillon!* in *Vingt ans de théories féministes sur le cinéma* (Ginette Vincendeau and Berenice Reynaud (eds), *CinémaAction* no. 67 (1993) pp 5-8.

In the realm of the census

Since the early 1970s, a major effort has been underway among feminist film critics to identify new, and resurrect forgotten, female 'auteurs'. With a few exceptions, however, comparatively little in-depth analysis exists on the many women directors working today in France.¹

Several factors are doubtless involved in our failure to discuss these women and their work. As Georgiana Colvile points out, most Francophone women directors choose to make popular films which fall somewhere 'between the ultra-marginal and the hyper-commercial'. According to Colvile, Anglophone commentators have focused on the cinema of Duras, Varda, and Akerman because 'theirs is a marginal avant-garde cinema, the only refuge of American women filmmakers, for whom Hollywood remains practically inaccessible'.² Fuelling US and British feminist interest in these particular women, I believe, is the fact that all have at various points referred to themselves as 'feminist', a label which many French women intellectuals shun.³ Add to these reasons two others. first there are virtually no feminist film theorists working in France;⁴ and second many of the post-1968 films are not readily available abroad or even, for that matter, in France – and you will understand why I have chosen to call this introductory section 'in the realm of the census', the better to question whether and why only certain directors 'count'.

I will focus in what follows on Nelly Kaplan's work and career, because I find the relative lack of attention to her work puzzling and

⁵ See Claire Johnston 'Women's cinema as counter cinema' in *Notes on Women's Cinema* (London Society for Education in Film and Television 1973) p. 25 reprinted in Bill Nichols (ed.) *Movies and Methods: an Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1976) p. 210

⁶ Only Diane Waldman Karyn Kay Marjorie Rosen and Beverley Houston have written on Kaplan's feature films. In short review pieces all focused on films with rebellious heroines and concentrated on Kaplan's recasting of myths and/or fairytales. Diane Waldman 'The eternal return of Circe' and Karyn Kay, 'The revenge of Pirate Jenny' *Velvet Light Trap* no. 9 (Summer 1973), pp. 49–51 and 46–9; Marjorie Rosen 'Women, sex and power' *Millimeter* vol. 4 (January 1976), pp. 36–7; Beverley Houston 'Néa' *Film Quarterly*, vol. 32 no. 3 (1979), pp. 46–9.

⁷ Though Kaplan insists that no rights were ever negotiated with her subtitled video dubs of *La fiancée du pirate* (under the title *A Very Curious Girl*), *Néa*, and *Charles et Lucie* (*Charles and Lucy*) are available in the USA from Facets Multimedia (1517 West Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60614). One of Kaplan's documentaries on Abel Gance is also available in a dubbed English version as *Abel Gance Yesterday and Tomorrow* from Em Gee Films (6924 Canby Avenue Suite 103 Reseda California 91335).

⁸ Asked why she did not go to Hollywood Kaplan replies that she suspects her interest in word play and etymology was the cause of her preference for Paris in school she learned that Paris – Par-Isis – was constructed on the site of a temple devoted to the Great Goddess Isis. See Nelly Kaplan Par Isis in *Le réservoir des sens suivi de la gardienne du temps* (Paris: Le Castor Astral 1995) p. 7.

therefore intriguing. One of the more prolific and versatile women working in film in France today, Kaplan has also long been associated with key figures in the French film, literary and art worlds. Although these fields are male-dominated, Kaplan has consistently managed to express herself on her own terms. Initially her films met with interest and praise from anglophone feminist critics: in her influential 1973 essay, Claire Johnston, for example, applauded the first features for the ways they reworked Hollywood stereotypes, and described Kaplan as a woman filmmaker who made pleasurable films for women.⁵ Since then, however, Kaplan's work has been largely ignored by feminist film historians,⁶ despite the fact that three of her features are available with subtitles in the USA.⁷

There is, however, much in Kaplan's life and much in her work which should appeal to a broad spectrum of feminists. Born in Buenos Aires in 1936 to Argentine parents of Russian – Jewish descent, as a girl Kaplan challenged the educational restrictions imposed on her but not on her brother. As a teenager, she became an avid movie-goer and, at age eighteen, her passion for film won out over her studies in economics. Knowing no French, she travelled alone to Paris as a representative of the Argentine Cinémathèque.⁸ That year, in 1954, she met Abel Gance at the French Cinémathèque.⁹ For the next ten years she worked with Gance on four of his last film projects, as assistant editor, director, actress, promoter, defender and more.¹⁰ In 1955, for example, she published a manifesto introducing Gance's *Magirama*, in 1960 a journal on the filming of Gance's *Austerlitz*, and in 1994 a BFI Film Classics guide on *Napoléon* (1927).¹¹

In the early 1960s Kaplan joined Claude Makovski's production company, Cythère Films, and began to direct documentaries about artists she admired, among them Gustave Moreau (1961), Victor Hugo (*Dessins et merveilles* [1961]), Rodolphe Bresdin (1962), Abel Gance (*Abel Gance, hier et demain* [1963]; *Abel Gance et son Napoléon* [1986]), André Masson (*A la source, la femme aimée*), and Pablo Picasso (*Le regard Picasso* [1967]).¹² In 1969 she finished her first feature film, *La fiancée du pirate*.¹³ She has since directed four other features and one made-for-TV movie: *Papa les petits bateaux* (1972), *Néa* (1976), *Charles et Lucie* (1979), *Pattes de velours* (for Antenne 2 [1986]), and *Plaisir d'amour* (1990). Claude Makovski and Jean Chapot have worked closely with her for twenty-five and ten years respectively, as producers, coproducers, writers, and co-writers.¹⁴ She in turn has worked with them on many of the films they have directed and/or scripted or produced for others.¹⁵ And she has also appeared in bit parts in *Papa les petits bateaux*, *Néa*, and *Charles et Lucie*.¹⁶

In addition to her work in cinema Kaplan has pursued a journalistic career, contributing, for example, a regular column on literature, film and art to *Le magazine littéraire*, and collaborating regularly on a television programme for *France Culture*. In 1966 she published a collection of surrealist short stories with illustrations by André

9 For further information on Kaplan's background and career see Derek Elley 'Hiding it under a bushel' *Films and Filming* vol 20 no 4 (1974) pp 22-5 and Lejeune *Le cinéma des femmes* pp 150-52

10 Kaplan had a part in and was present at the filming of *La tour de Nesle* (1955). She was an assistant director for *Magirama* (1956), edited the extracts from Gance's earlier *J'accuse* (1918 remade 1937) included in *Magirama* and directed the episodes entitled 'Auprès de ma blonde', 'Château de nuages', and 'La fête foraine'. She was an assistant director, editor and actress for *Austerlitz* (1960) and a technical collaborator, second unit director and editor for *Cyrano et d'Artagnan* (1964).

11 Nelly Kaplan *Manifeste d'un art nouveau la polylision* (Paris Caractères 1955) *Le sunlight d'Austerlitz* (Paris Pion 1963) *Napoleon* trans. Bernard McGuirk (London: British Film Institute 1994)

12 Kaplan produced, wrote or co-wrote, and edited or coedited most of the documentaries about art and artists which she directed. When censors cut four minutes of the 1964 *A la source la femme aimée* a short about André Masson's erotic drawings Kaplan disowned it. She has also directed *Les années 25* (1966) based on an exposition at the Museum of Decorative Arts and *La nouvelle grangerie* (1966) on the collection of Walter Guillaume

13 *La fiancée du pirate* was released in Britain as *Dirty Mary* and in the USA as *A Very Curious Girl*

14 On Kaplan's collaborations with Chapot and Makovski see further notes 15 and 16. Makovski produced many of Kaplan's shorts as well as *La fiancée du pirate*, *Pape les petits bateaux* and *Plaisir d'amour*. The

Masson, *Le réservoir des sens*, and in 1974 an erotic novel, *Un manteau de fou-rire ou les mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, both under the pen-name 'Belen'.¹⁷ In 1971 she brought out a *ciné-roman*, *Le collier de ptx*, under her own name.¹⁸

In 1986 Kaplan was made a 'Chevalier de la légion d'honneur' for the ensemble of her work. On the whole, however, her feature films have not been well received by French film critics.¹⁹ One woman reviewer even labelled *Néa a film-alibi* (a token woman's film), charging that Kaplan exalts phallocentrism at the expense of women.²⁰ Reviews in Britain and the USA have generally been more favourable, with critics of both sexes typically referring to Kaplan's films as 'feminist' whether or not they centre on female characters.²¹ Rather than call herself a feminist, however, Kaplan prefers, she told me, simply to say 'I'm not misogynist'.²² She maintains that: 'films made by women should be interesting, even disturbing, to *everyone*. We must tell stories, neither masculine nor feminine, but *stories*. And by this means we will overthrow that poisonous force which is so insidious in the cinema: its *misogyny*. . . . Poetesses, to your broomsticks! For an androgynous creation, sweet or bitter but violent!'²³ She is deeply critical of politics which repress free speech and creativity, and therefore worries that some feminists are too separatist, and/or too single minded. Earlier, Kaplan spoke out more frequently in support of the feminist movement. She is quoted as saying: 'I have a lot of sympathy with the feminist movement. If I don't burn by bra, it's merely because I happen to find it more practical to wear one. But in order to shake off forty centuries of slavery, any extreme is permitted.'²⁴

Is Kaplan's hesitation to tag herself 'feminist' partially responsible for the neglect of her work by Anglophone feminist film critics? Might her experimentation with topics like incest, rape, and pornography play a role? If so, where, and for whom?

Having today seen five of Kaplan's six feature films and most of her documentaries, read her books and several of her *Magazine littéraire* columns, surveyed the indexed reviews of her work, perused what critical work has been published on her films and literature, and met with Kaplan herself on several occasions, I am convinced that we have neither fully appreciated nor adequately assessed her contributions. Indeed, I am inclined to think we have misread her films because we have looked primarily and/or superficially at reworkings of female stereotypes, concentrated on female rather than unmarked or male points of view, not considered the documentaries, made-for-TV movies or literature, and ignored the significance of her collaborative projects. As Judith Mayne says, when we focus exclusively on women directors as directors, we risk 'romanticizing women's exclusion from the actual production of films. The assumption that women were either directors or nothing at all betrays a certain failure of the imagination'.²⁵

two men make cameo appearances in *Parties de velours* *Nea* and *Charles et Lucie* and Makovski has a small role in *La fiancée du pirate* as well

15 In 1974 Kaplan co-wrote and produced Makovski's film *Il faut vivre dangereusement*. From 1980-82 she co-wrote several made-for-TV movies with Chapot which he directed (*Un fait d'hiver*, *La tentation d'Antoine Livingstone* and *Ce fut un bel été*). In 1984 she co-wrote again with Chapot a film which he subsequently directed, *Regard dans le miroir*. In 1986 she co-wrote the dialogues for Chapot's made-for-TV movie *Le crépuscule des loups*. In 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994 respectively she co-wrote four other made-for-TV movies which he directed: *Les mouettes*, *Honorin et la Lorelei*, *Polly West est de retour* and *Honorin et l'enfant prodigue*.

16 Kaplan's other film credits include co-writing *La fiancée du pirate* with Makovski; adapting *Papa les petits bateaux* with Makovski and René Guyonnet, co-writing and adapting *Néa* with Chapot; coauthoring dialogues and adapting *Charles et Lucie* with Chapot and Makovski; and co-writing *Plaisir d'amour* with Chapot.

17 The most recent edition of *Le réservoir des sens* appears under Kaplan's own name. See note 8 and Belen, *Le réservoir des sens* (Paris: La Jeune Parque 1966, reprinted Paris: Jean Jacques Pauvert 1988). *Un manteau de foulure ou les mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert 1974). Subsequent references to the latter will abbreviate the title as *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* following Gwendolyn Wells's practice. See Gwendolyn Wells, 'Deviant games: *L'esprit créateur* vol. 31 no 4 (1991), pp. 69-77.

18 Nelly Kaplan, *Le collier de pyx*

This does not mean, of course, that I wish to tout Kaplan's work as 'ground-breaking' or that I am equally fond of all the films. I agree with Diane Waldman that 'one of the challenges of feminist historical and critical work [consists in] reconciling the sometimes contradictory projects of reclaiming women's contributions to the cinema with critical analysis and evaluation of the representations they helped to create'.²⁶ We must also, I believe, acknowledge that our own analyses and evaluations participate in turn in contemporary cultural debates. In Kaplan's case this is particularly obvious because she plays with pornographic and erotic traditions which some feminists find devoid of humorous or political promise.

I will argue in what follows that Kaplan's explorations of femininity and masculinity from unabashedly 'straight' perspectives are key to her mixes of porn, screwball, gangster, and thriller conventions. Emblematic of Kaplan's happily heterosexual stance is her punning embrace within her own work of classic and avant-garde texts by male authors and artists. Though her tastes are eclectic to say the least, much of her work is characterized by a dual fascination with sexuality and surrealism.

Since what is possible and permissible varies from medium to medium, however, in what follows I will analyse six seminal passages taken from texts produced for three different media. Two are presented from female points of view, three from unmarked points of view, and one from a male point of view.²⁷ All are explicitly concerned with heterosexual masculinity. In conclusion I will investigate the importance of her collaborations with Gance, Makovski, Chapot and others, the better to savour her tongue-in-cheek tactics, in order to demonstrate how much Kaplan has tried, like the male visionaries she admires and befriends, to work not in the realm of the *census*, but in the realm of the *senses*.

Diddling dicks, for fun and (sometimes) profit

Like much surrealist work, Kaplan's novels, short stories, films, and television movies undermine 'high art' traditions through references to pornography, pulp fiction and popular film. As André Pieyre de Mandiargues puts it, Kaplan's 'taste is manifestly for poetry, eroticism, the fantastic, science fiction and vampire stories'.²⁸ Yet while Kaplan makes surrealist desires her own, fancifully portraying sexual acts like consensual incest and necrophilia which many find shocking, she challenges male surrealist authority by insisting on women's autonomy and by subverting sexist images, including those which are most flattering to women.

Kaplan's no-holds-barred attack on received tradition – whether bourgeois, surrealist or feminist – is most in evidence in her fiction. Of all Kaplan's works, the erotic *bildungsroman* cum spy novel,

(Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert 1972) Makovski and Guyonnet are credited as collaborators

¹⁹ Of the fifteen reviews published in French film journals which I surveyed for this essay only two were positive and one mixed praise and criticism. I cannot comment on reviews written for newspapers

²⁰ See Françoise Jeancolas-Aude *Nea: Jeune cinéma* no. 95 (May/June 1976) p. 41

²¹ I surveyed twenty-three reviews written for English language newspapers and film journals. Only five are negative

²² Nelly Kaplan interview with the author, Paris, July 1993

²³ Nelly Kaplan, 'A nous l'histoire d'une de nos folies' trans. Barbara Halperin Martineau, *Women and Film* vol. 2 no. 7 pp. 11-12

²⁴ Nelly Kaplan biography, filmography, *Film Dope* no. 29 (March 1984), pp. 5-6

²⁵ Judith Mayne, 'Feminist film theory and criticism', in Diane Carson and Linda Dittmar and Janice R. Welsch (eds), *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1994) p. 59. In *The Woman at the Keyhole*, Mayne mentions a number of significant ways in which female signatures do appear on film texts, including the often forgotten often female screenwriter and actress Judith Mayne. *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990) p. 93

²⁶ Diane Waldman, *Not Wanted* (1949), in Annette Kuhn (ed.), *Queen of the Bs: Ida Lupino as Director* (Wiltshire: Flicks Books 1996) p. 13

²⁷ Kaplan's use of point of view structures never authorizes gendered political identification

Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps, is literally the most seminal: at age eight its heroine/narrator is baptized 'Belen' in squirts of milky ejaculate produced by six seamen – her father and five stalwart sailors – aboard the good ship Sperma. Before 'coming' the seamen masturbate using every possible orifice of a life-size, inflatable doll, programmed to moan on cue. The doll and the ejaculated name Belen thus literally and figuratively evoke what Gwendolyn Wells calls 'the process through which male desire constructs (and by extension, writes) its own (female) object'.²⁹

Kaplan's own adoption of the name 'Belen' as the pseudonym under which she publishes *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* (and earlier had published *Le réservoir des sens*) effectively 'feminizes' these 'seminal' processes of literary production. Subsequent variations in her usage of the name Belen, moreover, further dilute its ordinary associations with male bodily fluids while establishing its 'seminal' importance to her own work: in *Papa les petits bateaux* she appears as a character named Belen, and in *Charles et Lucie* she uses Belen in the credits as her stage name when appearing as the character Nostradamus.

Kaplan's wilful conflation, cross media, of her physical self with her authorial and fictional personae complicates pornographic tradition even as it foregrounds the presence of female subjectivity. The third of the salacious souvenirs which the character/author Belen recounts in *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, a souvenir she describes as provoking 'one of the most intense emotions of my life', is exemplary of Kaplan's revamping of male pornographic models. Like Belen's other childhood memories in *Mémoires*, it is very much determined by her height.³⁰ At ninety-six centimetres the little narrator finds herself literally eye-balling 'the splendid multi-coloured pendulous appendages'³¹ of my six men, frenetically tossing about according to the caprice of maritime labour or tenderly incubating, in rare moments of repose, two other charming spheroidal objects whose apparent vulnerability overwhelmed me. I squinted in astonishment, divining through my precocious intelligence that these objects would be of an importance *without paragon*.³²

Belen's admiring inspection and mock worship of fragmented male bodies pokes gleeful fun at centuries of loving dissection of female bodies by the 'great men' of French literature, from Ronsard to Sade to Breton. As I have suggested, however, her insistence on penetrating pornographic tradition in the interest of opening sexual exploration to women may be troubling to certain readers, as too may be the fact that, throughout *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, Belen is manifestly more concerned with men than with women. As a child, Belen watches innumerable heterosexual couplings; then as a young adult, has many affairs with men. She makes love with a woman just once, during an orgy.³³ She refers to her mother only on page one, and elsewhere declares herself to be a 'militant maternophobe'.³⁴ Though

without also troubling such identification. Many of the films for example include pastiche point-of-view shots taken from animal perspectives. We look with a blissfully masturbating cat in *Nea*, a smirking donkey voyeur in *Plaisir d'amour* and a devoted ram in *La fiancée du pirate*.

²⁸ André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Nelly Kaplan, *Obliques*, nos 14–15 (1973), p. 70.

²⁹ Wells, *Deviant games*, p. 70.

³⁰ See *ibid.* for a more in-depth discussion of Kaplan's appropriations of male pornography.

³¹ I include this word play in my translation because of Kaplan's fondness for alliterative word games. The original French *pendulettes* literally means small clock.

³² Belen, *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, p. 14.

³³ See *ibid.*, p. 184. A very discreet reference to the nine year-old Belen watching lesbian acts occurs slightly earlier: 'While twenty or so women guerrilla fighters [there are twenty-four in all] and Szuma Olaf Circumcision Baklava and Doudouie [the five seamen] acquainted themselves thoroughly with each other the others preferred to give themselves to each other in games which allowed me to learn new ways of honouring this god who would so mark my existence' *Ibid.* p. 71.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 201.

³⁵ Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 123–4. Stella Behar notes further that Belen's refusal of maternity in favour of sexuality dovetails with the early 1970s French feminist focus on the legalization of abortion. See Behar, Belen

by no means the only possible feminist approach to 'mother' or 'motherhood', Belen's avoidance of the maternal is understandable because, Angela Carter explains, for so many and so long 'Mother' meant 'a concrete denial of the idea of sexual pleasure since her sexuality has been placed at the service of reproductive function alone'.³⁵

Belen's father, in contrast, is not only the 'author of my days' but, by her own choice, her first sexual partner. As a teenager she even criticizes him for not allowing her to be sexually initiated before her first menstrual flow, writing in a footnote, 'I found this a bit stupid why mix voluptuousness and reproductive possibilities?'³⁶ Only the threat of pregnancy inhibits her enthusiasm for heterosexual sex. Towards the end of the book when she accidentally does become pregnant, she is able to abort the foetus using a carnivorous plant. Thrilled at finding a natural, painless, abortion procedure, she sends seeds from the plant to women's liberation movements around the world.³⁷

Kaplan's 1976 film *Néa* continues the emphasis of *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* on the sexual liberation and education of its young heroine, without specifically attacking women's reduction to their reproductive capacities. Based on Emmanuelle Arsan's erotic novel of the same name, Kaplan's third film is a relatively low-budget movie intended for general audiences. Although Kaplan manages to rehearse and revise pornographic tradition with the aid of assorted fairytales, romantic fiction and the Pygmalion myth, as a mainstream film, it necessarily includes more pulp than porn.³⁸ Like Arsan's novel and *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, *Néa* inscribes a number of different sexual acts including female masturbation, lesbianism and heterosexual sex, but the film's painterly tableaux suggest more than they show. Kaplan's composition of the lesbian scene between Sibylle's mother (Micheline Presle) and aunt (Françoise Brion), for example, mimics Gustave Moreau's fondness for silver-draped, carefully posed, beautiful women. Watching from the door, as always wearing her horn-rimmed glasses, the young Sibylle (Anne Zacharias) observes the two tastefully unclothed older women in long shot as they kiss and fondle each other. The camera slowly pans to a medium two-shot of a kiss on a breast, then to one woman's hand on the other's genitalia. The arrival of Sibylle's father (Heinz Bennent) puts a stop to any further lovemaking. Significantly, Sibylle never engages in lesbian sex herself.

The sequence which is literally and figuratively the most climactic in the film version of *Néa* flirts with, but ultimately thwarts, heterosexual male pornographic expectations, all the while featuring female voyeurism. Yet although the lavishly lascivious descriptions of Kaplan's fiction are missing, her concern with bric-a-brac, costume and decor provides a certain visual pleasure. The sequence opens in a luxury ski chalet. A beautiful strawberry blonde, the sixteen-year-old

plaider pour une Aphrodite
desenchaînée *Mélusine* no 12
(1981) p 235

³⁶ Beien *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* p 91

³⁷ *Ibid* pp 199–201

³⁸ Compare Emmanuelle Arsan *Néa a Young Emmanuelle* trans Celeste Piano (London: Granada Publishing 1978) In a move clearly designed to capitalize on the success of the *Emmanuelle* porn film series Kaplan's film version of *Néa* was released in the USA and the UK as *A Young Emmanuelle*

Sibylle Ashby, says goodbye to her darkly handsome older lover and publisher, Axel Thorpe (Sam Frey), as he sets off for a day of skiing. She reminds him to be home by five, when her father, mother and older sister are due to arrive. Then she goes up to her room to read Michelet's *La sorcière* and to plot revenge: Axel is sleeping with her older sister (Chantal Bronner) and basking in the praise and profits garnered by the great erotic novel, *Néa*, which Sibylle, not he, has written. After a brief nap, she appears on the balcony clad only in striped red and green knee socks and a short white robe which she has left suggestively open. She beckons to the only other person in the chalet, a young teenage admirer (Martin Provost), and invites him up to her room to 'make love'.

Like Belen in *Mémoires*, Sibylle is always intent on furthering her own erotic education. She therefore first examines the boy's non-erect penis in long shot, wearing surgical gloves and horn-rimmed glasses. Her cat/familiar purrs and looks away as she touches the boy's leg. Then, still in long shot and still wearing her knee socks and robe, she lies down beside him. A cut, and the boy emerges from the room fully clothed, closing the door behind him. Presumably Sibylle has masturbated him. All we see, however, is a close-up of Sibylle scooping up his semen from her sheets and placing it carefully into a glass.

In a manual on how to make a hard core porn film, Steven Ziplow counsels aspiring directors 'if you don't have the come shots, you don't have a porno picture'.³⁹ In *Néa*, Kaplan both apes and avoids such conventions, providing come, but no come shot: the moment of male pleasure is edited out. As a result, male satisfaction in looking – not just at women but also, and perhaps more importantly, at the penis of porn films – is stymied. When Sibylle's family arrives, inference is all: methodically, Sibylle rips her clothes, smears the ejaculate on her genitals, and begins to scream. The half-naked Axel runs in from the bathroom to see what is wrong. Still screaming, she pulls him on top of her. The family burst in, and... Axel faces a charge of statutory rape. At the end of the film the ever-proud witch/princess is happily reunited with her now humbled prince, though Kaplan says that she personally does not believe they will stay together for the rest of their lives.⁴⁰

Toying with topics like rape and incest the better to undo male privilege and tweak male pride is a constant in Kaplan's literary and film fiction. Except for scenes like those in *Néa* and *Mémoires* where male bodies are examined by female characters, however, most of Kaplan's work does not literally inscribe female points of view but rather is centred on heterosexual male protagonists described via an unmarked, third-person point of view. In some ways, Kaplan's last two feature films, *Charles et Lucie* and *Plaisir d'amour*, are thus more typical of her film oeuvre in that both rework power relations between men and women without insisting on female points of view.

³⁹ Stephen Ziplow *The Filmmaker's Guide to Pornography* (New York: Drake 1977), p 34. Thanks to Linda Williams for alerting me to Ziplow's book.

⁴⁰ Nelly Kaplan letter to the author 28 July 1995

Nelly Kaplan directing Ginette Garcin and Daniel Ceccaldi in *Charles et Lucie*, 1979. Picture © Nelly Kaplan.



Surrealist largely thanks to its affection for popular genres and sudden reversals, *Charles et Lucie* is more episodic than Kaplan's other feature films, though not her written fiction or her made-for-TV movie. A rags to riches screwball comedy cum road movie peppered with allusions to fairytales and myths, the basic premiss of *Charles et Lucie* is simple: a middle-aged couple who constantly quarrel. Charles (Daniel Ceccaldi) and Lucie (Ginette Garcin) must, in the midst of adversity, learn to love again. Approached by shyster lawyers promising a fabulous inheritance, the lazy Charles convinces the hard-working Lucie to sell everything she owns to pay the legal fees required to process the claim. All they net is a tumble-down shack in a run-down area on the Riviera. To make matters worse, they have unwittingly bought, and are driving, a stolen car. Nearly caught by the police, they flee, and a series of chase scenes – by cops and crooks alike – begins.

The sequence I find particularly telling here takes place just after the two are robbed of all their clothes by young thugs. Not narratively necessary and quite prosaic in comparison with Kaplan's wilfully pornographic and virulently sacreligious literature, this scene is nevertheless typical of how Kaplan offhandedly and inoffensively critiques Christian, especially Catholic, rites – and wrongs – in her films. Naked under a pile of leaves, Charles and Lucie awake under an apple tree. An apple drops. In an obviously feminist reversal of the Adam and Eve story, a serpent watches overhead as, in medium two-shot, Charles/Adam thoughtfully hands the famished Lucie/Eve the apple. Instead of doom and exile, however, his gesture now portends contrition and consideration. At the end of the film the pair emerge unscathed from their bouts with Biblical formulae: they launch

a successful career as music-hall entertainers and finally do inherit a lot of money

Like *Néa*, *Charles et Lucie* pokes fun at narcissistic men obsessed with gain and conquest but ends with the reconstitution of a happier-than-ever heterosexual couple. *Plaisir d'amour* goes further, in large part because here Kaplan takes as her target one of the most notorious womanizers of all time, Don Juan. Recasting a classic which haunted her Argentine youth, Tirso de Molina's circa 1630 version of the Don Juan legend, *El Burlador de Sevilla*, together with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, the Tarot, and several Symbolist poems, Kaplan again produces her own hybrid myth. Filmed on a tropical island replete with wild animals and exotic flowers, the colour and composition of many shots again, as in *Néa*, evoke painterly predecessors, here Gauguin and Le Douanier Rousseau.

Set in 1935, the story begins in earnest when the world-weary, suicidal M. de Burlador (Pierre Ardit) arrives on the island, his curiosity piqued by the prospect of tutoring a beautiful young virgin named Flo. Fragments of femininity – a diary, a photo, a doll, a dress and, most importantly, little white undies – serve as tantalizing indices that she exists, yet she is nowhere to be found. Instead M. de Burlador is greeted and seduced by 'her' lovely grandmother, Do (Françoise Fabian), lovely mother, Clo (Dominique Blanc) and equally lovely sister, Jo (Cecille Sanz de Alba).

Subversion of literary models and reversal of gendered power relations are everywhere in evidence. A key sequence succinctly rewrites one of the more vitriolic passages of Sade's *La philosophie dans le boudoir*. As in *Néa*, however, *Plaisir*'s depictions of sexual acts are relatively chaste, with both male and female bodies always at least partially clothed, tastefully draped and beautifully lit. In *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, Sade's principal mouthpiece (bad pun intended), Dolmancé, instructs a young female pupil named Eugénie in his boudoir: 'there is no man who does not want to be a despot when he fucks: it seems he finds less pleasure if others appear to be enjoying themselves as much as he is . . . The idea of seeing another experience pleasure as he does suggests a kind of equality which harms the indescribable attractions despotism brings'.⁴¹ In clear rejoinder, Kaplan has the beautiful mother of the film instruct M. de Burlador upstairs in her bedroom: 'We've made love. I came. You came. We came. It's a beautiful conjugation, but it gives you no rights over me '

That Kaplan makes the mother her agent is sweetly feminist revenge on Sade, who ends *La philosophie dans le boudoir* with Eugénie literally sewing up her mother's labia after she has been raped, whipped and infected with syphilis. Kaplan is nowhere near as cruel: as her film progresses, 'Flo's' grandmother and older sister reinforce Clo's message again and again until, thoroughly exhausted

⁴¹ Marquis de Sade *La philosophie dans le boudoir* Oeuvres complètes vol 3 (Paris: Editions Pauvert 1986) p. 541

but ever hopeful, M. de Burlador finally flees the island, vanquished by those he had thought to victimize but still convinced his imaginary pupil is alive. As in *La fiancée du pirate* and *Néa*, women triumph through their sexuality, but for the first time they do so together, as women, as mothers, and as daughters.

In part because it is not narrated from a gendered perspective, M. de Burlador's defeat is nevertheless less complete than that of the first person male narrator in 'Je vous salue, maris', ('I Salute You, Husbands'), the second of the twenty-two mocking, hallucinatory and scabrous short stories which comprise *Le réservoir des sens*.⁴² Throughout the collection Kaplan clearly signals her debts to, and occasionally her critiques of, Lautréamont, Baudelaire, Apollinaire, Blake, Jesus Christ and other famous men, quoting, deforming, and embedding citations at the start of and within each story. As in *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, word play is thus the key to Kaplan's trenchant humour. Here, however, the shorter format facilitates experimentation with several different literary genres, including science fiction, the fantastic, horror, fairytales and more.

Like all of Kaplan's fictional work, the majority of the stories tackle the taboos and investigate the inequities which prevent the full flowering of heterosexual eroticism, usually because women are deprived of sexuality and power, but also because men and women both persist in mythologizing their own, and especially the other, sex.⁴³ In the case of 'Je vous salue, maris', Kaplan scathingly criticizes the ways patriarchal authority is ostensibly disavowed but actually underwritten by veneration of the Virgin: *je vous salue, Marie (I salute you, Mary)*. The overtly blasphemous pun placed as epigraph for this tale – '... et delivrez-nous de *mâle*' ('deliver us from the male') – continues *Charles et Lucie*'s parodies of Biblical formulae, as *le male* replaces its homonymic equivalent, *le mal* (evil). The male narrator, self-described as more-intelligent-than-most, speaks from a future where, for centuries, a matriarchy has ruled. An ideology of the 'eternal masculine' holds sway: men are the weaker sex, anaesthetized into passivity and programmed to desire women. 'Men never invent anything... never create anything striking [and] women are always right.'⁴⁴ The only hope for change lies in strange, mutant androgynes who might one day supplant both men and women.⁴⁵ As the story ends, however, the narrator is 'saluted', undressed, and to his unwilling delight, taken by yet another woman.

Kaplan's imaginary explorations of male/female pleasure are probably most wide-ranging in *Le réservoir des sens*, where they encompass heterosexual relationships with statues, animals, phantoms, and even the dead. Many of the stories use tales of metamorphoses – of a woman to and from a panther or statue, for example – as a way to question received notions of identity: to extend a comment made by Béhar, Kaplan's wit is not directed at men *per se*, but rather at the man who refuses to see a woman as she is *at a particular moment*.⁴⁶

⁴² Only one other story *Lorsque la femme parée*... is narrated in a first person voice marked as male. A few are narrated in an unmarked third person singular voice. The overwhelming majority of the stories are narrated in a first person female voice.

⁴³ Only the last story *Le réservoir des sens*, inscribes homosexual desire: a male robot designed to provide his female owner with the ultimate in pleasure kills her with 'kindness' because he desires his good-looking male mechanic and she is too possessive to let him 'experiment' with men.

⁴⁴ Kaplan *Le réservoir des sens* pp 18–19

⁴⁵ A later story describes the reign of the mutants as equally unsuccessful however. See Kaplan *L'éternal détour* *Le réservoir des sens* pp 75–6

⁴⁶ Béhar's argument differs slightly from mine leaving open the possibility that an essential feminine exists. She says en métamorphosant ses personnages Belen met souvent cette mythologie de la mutation au service d'une vengeance dont la cible n'est pas l'homme en tant que tel mais celui qui refuse de voir la femme telle qu'elle est (the target is not man in general but the man who refuses to see woman as she is...) Béhar Belen p 234

The made-for-TV mystery, *Pattes de velours*, forcefully and comically makes an important corollary point: individuals of both sexes, not just women, suffer from the perennial war between the sexes. *Pattes de velours* begins when two women, one older (Bernadette Lafont), one younger (Caroline Sihol), accidentally discover that they are married to the same man (Pierre Arditi). When he returns home to Lafont, both women greet him with the news that, unless he agrees to live in the unheated attic and be their servant, they will prosecute him for bigamy. Terrified, he accepts their bargain. His life is utterly miserable until other characters arrive to force the women, in turn, into servitude. Nevertheless the film ends with the male characters unquestionably worse off than the women; in the closing shots the two women friends go happily off together, carrying their cat, whereas the bigamist husband, now blinded, is left behind with his detective-accomplice (Michel Bouquet), now crippled. Intended as a tribute to Balzac, *Pattes de velours* includes a song written by Kaplan which, she says, incorporates a line from Balzac's theosophical novel *Seraphita*: 'Who will deliver us from men and women?' ('Qui nous délivrera des hommes et des femmes?'). The lyrics conclude, 'in this millenary game, . . . there are only losers' Kaplan continues: 'Who will deliver us from men and women, or rather from the warped power relations (in one way or another) which have governed their relationships for so long? Because if, to differing degrees, none of the protagonists emerges completely unscathed from the adventure, one has only to blame oneself and the bizarre desire which pushes certain bipeds to want at all costs to control the existence of others'⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Nelly Kaplan Antenne 2's promotional material on *Pattes de velours* p. 6

⁴⁸ See Elley 'Hiding it under a bushel' p. 22 Chapot and Kaplan have much in common. Chapot says of his collaboration with Kaplan 'We are at the same time completely different and very complementary. We both like the hero (or heroine) to win at the end of the film and the characters to expend all their energy inflicting their personal destiny.' Jean Chapot Antenne 2's promotional material on *Pattes de velours* p. 7

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 6

⁵⁰ See for example the short interview with Kaplan included in Nelly Kaplan biography/filmography

⁵¹ Soupault declares passionately 'vous êtes un ami une amie la seule' (a male friend, a female friend: the only female friend). Philippe Soupault 'Lettre à Nelly Kaplan' *Cahiers Philippe Soupault* vol. 1 (1994) p. 215. Mandargues praises her feminine power which distinguishes itself from the nostalgia of the eternal feminine because it attempts a revolutionary uprising. André Pieyre de Mandiargues private collection of Nelly Kaplan

In *Pattes de velours* as in all her literary and cinematic fiction, Kaplan thus mocks heterosexual institutions without invalidating heterosexual relationships. One can not therefore legitimately label *Pattes de velours*, 'Je vous sauve, maris', *Plaisir d'amour*, *Charles et Lucie*, *Néa* or *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* simply 'works by a woman, about women, for women', for all in some way satirize human pretensions. The feature films, in particular, are from start to finish partnership productions, designed to appeal to both male and female audiences, written and/or produced, as I have mentioned, by Kaplan together with Chapot and Makovski. Kaplan herself proudly maintains that 'if one were to chop the credits off [my] films one would have extreme difficulty in guessing the director's sex'⁴⁸ With obvious relish she quotes Samuel Goldwyn: 'If you want to send a message, use Western Union'.⁴⁹ For her, pleasure is principal; time and again she says, 'I like to laugh and to make others laugh'.⁵⁰

Those who have worked with her all comment on her insolence, her honesty and her love of the absurd. Philippe Soupault and André Pieyre de Mandiargues pay her perhaps the ultimate compliment when they describe her as profoundly gendered and as beyond gender.⁵¹ Chapot signals 'the elegance of her thought, her quick-witted and

52 Chapot Antenne 2's promotional material on *Parties de Velours* p. 8

53 Abel Gance 'Autour d'Austerlitz en 80 jours' Preface to Kaplan *Le sunlight d'Austerlitz* p. 11
Gance further describes Kaplan as imperial Amorality of exalted lineage beyond good and evil Incapable of base physical transactions but active coquetry when events so dictate Noble Headstrong Ferocious Enormous but diffuse tenderness Abel Gance Jugement sur N K' 21 June 1955, private collection of Nelly Kaplan
Pablo Picasso, Soupault Mandargues and Bernadette Lafont similarly insist on Kaplan's rebelliousness and creativity Lafont captures Kaplan's charisma 'Her personal chemistry is not of this world Her roots are with prophets witches For her, the making of a film is a real rite of initiation' Bernadette Lafont *La fiancée du pirate* (Paris: Olivier Organ, 1978), pp. 122-3
54 Claude Makovski letter to Nelly Kaplan, 29 December 1986 private collection of Nelly Kaplan

55 See Judith Mayne 'Lesbian looks Dorothy Arzner and female authorship' in Bad Object-Choices (ed.), *How Do I Look?* (Seattle Bay Press 1991) pp. 103-34

56 Anne Friedberg, 'On H. D. woman history recognition' *Wide Angle*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1982) p. 28, cited in Mayne, 'Feminist film theory and criticism' p. 64

57 Kaplan would not wish to be taken as the model since as she insists, to date only a few women have been allowed to be inspired See Kaplan 'A nous l'histoire d'une de nos folies' p. 12

brilliant finds of ideas for plots and dialogues, the insolence and irreverence of the subjects she proposes, her sense of repartee'.⁵² Gance praises 'the rare lucidity of her mind, her verve for caricature, her pen sharpened against the reverse-side of life's situation, her perpetual revolt against all forms of imbecility'.⁵³ And though he stresses how contradictory she can be, Makovski finds that her dominant characteristic is her 'savage humour'.⁵⁴

The many pictures of Kaplan standing next to or between Gance, Picasso, André Breton, Orson Welles, Michel Simon and others – displayed in *Le sunlight d'Austerlitz*, in critical reviews, and in the two documentaries on Gance – tell the same tale of alliances grounded in appreciation, admiration, amusement and affection. But what might these various testimonies of comic couples, from contented collaborators, suggest for contemporary appreciations of Kaplan's relationships to feminism, pornography, eroticism and myth? To answer I would like to focus for a moment on the photographs, then turn to the documentaries, and finally conclude by again commenting on the feature films and fiction. For reasons which will soon be clear, I group my concluding responses under the heading below.

Through the eyes of Nelly Kaplan, a very curious girl

Like the photos Judith Mayne studies of a butchy middle-aged Dorothy Arzner seated above or standing beside glamorous female stars, the photos of a beautiful young Kaplan standing next to or behind famous older men reveal more: in Arzner's case, a visible and seductive lesbianism, disavowed, Mayne asserts, by Arzner herself and by most contemporary feminist film theory; in Kaplan's case a happily flirtatious heterosexuality, generally also overlooked and unanalysed by feminist film critics.⁵⁵

Why not begin instead to see these photos of Kaplan, et al., as representative of a 'sidling up to patriarchy' implying, as Anne Friedberg argues of H. D., both 'a skill imbued with a euphoria of control' and 'a siblinghood of shared power'?⁵⁶ Here, certainly, is a model of how a woman survived, produced and created for over four decades within (with no possibility of 'without') male-dominated French avant gardes and establishments.⁵⁷ To recognize how expert Kaplan is at 'man-oeuvring' (if I may be allowed a very bad cross-cultural pun), is not to deny that, in her work with film and television as producer, director, screenwriter, actress and editor, as well as in her fictional and journalistic writings, she has consistently pushed against the boundaries and biases which construct women as objects, reduce women to helpmates, and restrict what might be thought of as pleasurable. Rather, I think, it implies a fuller acknowledgement of the contexts within which she has done so while often trying to reach general audiences.

Nelly Kaplan with André Breton, Abel Gance and Benjamin Péret, 1957 ...



... and with Pablo Picasso, 1957. Pictures © Nelly Kaplan.



But if expressions like 'sliding up to patriarchy' are truly to be of use, it is crucial that we recognize that individual men and women occupy different places, at different times, within patriarchal institutions which themselves change. In Kaplan's case we must admit, for example, that while the men with whom she has been intimately associated have at times received more attention than she has, they have like her been rebels, and they have often not enjoyed commercial success or critical acclaim. Picasso prided himself on being a bad boy: in *Le regard Picasso*, for example, he proclaims, much as Kaplan herself would, that 'art is never chaste. If it's chaste, it's not art'. Gance was notoriously disdainful of mainstream conventions and market constraints, charging that they reduced the

⁵⁸ Gance *Autour d'Austerlitz* en 80 jours pp 10–11. Gance did however often accomplish miracles by sheer force of will as Jean Epstein comments in *Abel Gance et son Napoleon* Gance veut toujours plus qu'il ne peut mais il peut toujours tout ce qu'il veut (Gance always wants to do more than he can but he can always do what he wants) See also Gance in Kaplan *Napoleon* pp 43–4

⁵⁹ Nelly Kaplan interview with the author Paris July 1993

⁶⁰ Evil dictators are commonly found in works with Asian African and Latin American settings in *Le collier du ptyx* for example the arch fiend is a general named Duvalier in *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* Belen's adversary is known as Joseph Acer a.k.a. Joe Steel a.k.a. Joseph Stalin head of the CIA (Compagnie des Indes Américaines) In contrast *Plaisir d'amour* and *Néa* target pompous would be patriarchs while *La fiancée du pirate* and *Charles et Lucie* castigate narrow minded villagers

⁶¹ *Les mouettes*, Honnorin et la Lorelei Polly West est de retour and Honnorin et l'enfant prodigue broke audience records for television films in France in 1990 and 1992 respectively

⁶² During the Autumn and Winter of 1993 and 1994 Kaplan's films were shown in major art museums in Washington DC Chicago and Boston In Boston the series was titled more appropriately I think A very curious girl the films of Nelly Kaplan

⁶³ Michelle Citron Women's film production going mainstream in E Deirdre Pribram (ed) *Female Spectators* (London Version 1988) p 58

⁶⁴ I heard Kaplan give this response at the post screening discussion of *Plaisir d'amour* in Boston

initial voltage of *Austerlitz* by seventy-five per cent. In his preface to Kaplan's *Le sunlight d'Austerlitz* he describes how the film he had for years dreamed of making became a production nightmare: 'You must . . . prostitute ideas by dressing them up to conform to the buyer's taste, and strangle the constant rebellion of the cinematic material'.⁵⁸

Of course Kaplan differs from Gance in some respects. Although she learned how to make experimental films from him, she has tried, as Gance at times also did, to reach broader audiences by making mainstream films.⁵⁹ Yet her rebelliousness is always in evidence, manifest especially in her unwavering commitment to erotic art, literature, and cinema. Like much surrealist work, her film and literary fiction is anti-authoritarian and pro-individual: her heroes and heroines are misfits and/or artists; her villains are dictators, patriarchs, or small-minded townspeople.⁶⁰ Few are precisely situated in time or place such specificity is, after all, anathema to the mainstream genres she plays with and filters through surrealism.

Despite her commitment to popular genres and mass media, however, Kaplan finds it difficult to market and exhibit her movies, television shows and books: several of the books are out of print, *Pattes de velours* was never rebroadcast; many of the documentary and feature films are not in distribution. Her greatest successes have, in fact, been as a screenwriter for television films directed by others.⁶¹ Ironically, given her desire to reach popular audiences, the most recent screenings of her features have taken place in art museums, programmed together with her art documentaries in a series entitled in Washington, DC, 'The Pleasure of Art'.⁶²

Kaplan's failure to reach the general public she targets with her feature films proves once again that, to quote Michelle Citron, 'any kind of film production is a compromise forced on a constantly shifting matrix of content, aesthetics, accessibility, access to financial and production resources, distribution and exhibition potential, and so on'.⁶³ Nor does Kaplan's decision to approach filmmaking differently than Gance did reflect a fundamental difference in attitude. On the contrary, each has stubbornly asserted that she/he is independent and autonomous, even using strikingly similar formulae to do so. Gance wrote 'NSAI' – *ne subir aucune influence* (submit to no influence) – at the bottom of each page of his shooting notes; Kaplan tersely responds to questions about formative forerunners with 'I am a very curious girl. I am not influenceable'.⁶⁴

Most importantly, Kaplan shares with Gance and the other artists with and on whom she has worked the conviction that the real and the surreal, seeing and foreseeing, are intimately, magically linked. In a documentary on one of her favourite painters, Gustave Moreau, she describes how he modifies myths 'through the eyes of a strange voyeur'. The same could well be said of her own work, for she feels strongly that, as Gance is heard to say in *Abel Gance et son*

Napoléon, 'Copier la réalité, pourquoi faire?' ('Copy reality, why do it?').

My choice of overall title for this paper, 'The eyes of Nelly Kaplan', is thus to be understood on multiple levels: as a reference to the importance of vision – literally, metaphorically and metaphysically – for and within Kaplan's work; and as a tribute to her fascination with popular films like *The Eyes of Laura Mars* (Irvin Kershner, 1978) which explore, as she does, connections among horror, the surreal, the fantastic and the erotic. By reviewing Kaplan's work in this essay, my desire is not to add her to a list of women directors which will some day – heaven forbid! – be complete.⁶⁵ As Patrice Petro says, 'the project of reconstituting film history from a feminist perspective is not merely a matter of making the invisible "visible".... It also involves... rethinking critical methods and theoretical procedures in contemporary film theory (e.g., the status of textual analysis, the relationship between authorship and biography, the role of extratextual determinations on the cinema and its audiences).'⁶⁶

Precisely because Kaplan's oeuvre fits no easy categories, I believe, it should be of interest to those who would write history differently, history in general, and feminist film history in particular. To look through the eyes of Nelly Kaplan necessarily entails acknowledging her juggling of roles, mixing of genres, citing of models, insistence on heterosexual eroticism, even refusal of the tag 'feminist'. I, for one, particularly admire the fact that, despite adversity, Kaplan has continued to make films, still convinced that, as Gance puts it at the end of *Abel Gance, hier et demain*, 'with both feet tied, we must jump ahead'

Nor is it coincidental that, for Kaplan as for Gance, film has a special role to play in delighting and inciting those 'qui savent voir', 'who know how to look, to see, and to foresee'. Though, like Orson Welles, Gance sometimes declared that if he had his life to live over again, it would not be in films, he nevertheless firmly believed in the value of showing audiences 'the invisible in the visible'.⁶⁷ As he says, again at the end of *Abel Gance, hier et demain*, 'the real magic for which cinema was created is the metamorphosis of man beyond himself'.⁶⁸

Kaplan would agree, though as a woman she would, I think, take exception if 'man' were taken to exclude 'woman'. As the mystical character Nostradamus in *Charles et Lucie*, for example, she chides Charles for assuming that as a man, he should have his fortune told first. Nevertheless it is to Charles, not to Lucie, that she addresses her laments about the dearth of dreamers today:

Fortune-telling is no longer what it used to be. Before, people came to me so that I could open the doors to the marvellous for them. I was the intermediary between their dreams and reality. I taught

⁶⁵ Claire Johnston succinctly sums up the problems facing feminist film criticism. Merely to introduce women into the dominant notion of film history as yet another series of facts to be assimilated into the existing notions of chronology would quite clearly be sterile and regressive. Only an attempt to situate Arzner's work in a theoretical way would allow us to comprehend her real contribution to film history. Claire Johnston, Dorothy Arzner: critical strategies in Constance Penley (ed.), *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 37.

⁶⁶ Patrice Petro, 'Feminism and film history' in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism* p. 66.

⁶⁷ See further Kaplan, *Napoleon*, pp. 9-39.

⁶⁸ See also *ibid.* p. 44.



Nelly Kaplan with Orson Welles and Abel Gance during the filming of *Austerlitz*, 1956.
Picture © Nelly Kaplan.



Abel Gance and Nelly Kaplan at Studio 28, 1957. First published in *Paris Match*.

them to follow their intuition. Now the only things they ask me are, 'Will I win at bingo, at the races, the lottery? Will I inherit? When? How much?' Great dreams are gone.

Diviners may indeed encounter difficulties today, but as filmmaker-cum-actress-cum-character Nelly Kaplan/Belen/Nostradamus has a powerful edge. With the aid of marijuana cigarettes and green filters she ensures that the characters and, vicariously, the audience of *Charles et Lucie* experience a time when all creatures are surrealistically transformed, bathed in green light from a rare setting sun at the sea.

The quintessential Kaplanian vision of movie magic is nonetheless not found in her films, but in *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*. Here her ribald visions of the power of cinema transcend *Charles et Lucie*'s hallucinogenic healing of unhappy heterosexuals and surpass Gance's hopes for the transformation of 'man beyond himself'. Near the end of *Mémoires*, the young Belen encounters a couple living happily, without children, on a tiny island in the Cape Verde archipelago. With a few faithful collaborators, they have established a successful production company specializing in films to awaken the slumbering instincts of stallions and bulls. Belen describes one of the productions as follows:

The apotheosis . . . invariably consisted in a sequence of collective friendship enacted by the whole troop [of bulls, cows, stallions and mares] . . . Closeups were always the object of meticulous attention and some scenes proved themselves impregnated with a fabulous poetry. The slow motion filming of a sequence of an immense bull phallus, its introduction into the orifice of its startled companion, to arrive at the foamy triumph of ejaculation, accompanied by a striking soundtrack of cries of rutting, was worthy of playing in cinemas around the world. For that matter, it does play there . . . The results are always identical: after seeing the film on gigantic screens stretched over the prairies at sunset, the most indifferent of stallions becomes so genetically aggressive that the animal population in the targeted regions has practically doubled. As also the profits of the happy proprietors. A beautiful example of increased returns through a conjunction of art, intelligence, pleasure and work, to be cited as a model.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Belen, *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* pp 84-6

A model for feminist film criticism? As currently constituted, a challenge. Yet also a perverse recipe, one which includes merging senses *and* census, diddling dicks for fun *and* profit, looking through the eyes of a very curious girl . . . Nelly Kaplan.

Warmest thanks to Nelly Kaplan for answering my questions and making available copies of some of her films. Thanks also to Bo Smith of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and to Georgiana Colvile

Inangbayan, the mother-nation, in Lino Brocka's Bayan Ko: Kapit Sa Patalim and Orapronobis

ROLAND B. TOLENTINO

*Weeping without ceasing for thy sons,
And weeping always of thy griefs
I have been vigilant to record
This work to the end of mixing my tears
With those which stream from thine eyes
To thee I dedicate it it is very weak because
It is mine; accept it, because I have nothing else dearer.*

‘To the motherland’, Aurelio Tolentino’s dedication to his play *Luhang Tagalog (Tagalog Tears)*¹

On 24 March 1995, Flor Contemplacion, a Filipina maid who worked in Singapore, was buried in a private memorial grave donated by the mayor of her home town eighty miles south of Manila. This was no ordinary funeral. The Bishop of Manila, Teodoro Bacani, officiated at the mass. A flag draped her coffin; estimates of the crowd which lined the streets for her funeral procession, vary between 40,000 and 100,000 of whom around 30,000 were organized and mobilized by activist groups from Manila. In the capital, thousands of students and workers tore up Singaporean flags and then burned them ‘while chanting slogans condemning [President Fidel] Ramos’s failure to save Contemplacion’.² The action was repeated in a public market, in factories owned by Singaporeans, and in a shopping street. The Singaporean Embassy and the office of Singapore Airlines were

1 From Arthur Stanley Riggs's translation in *The Filipino Drama* (1905) (Manila: Ministry of Human Settlements Intramuros Administration 1981) p. 67

2 Philippine News Agency
100,000 brave heat to attend
Flor's funeral. *Philippine Times*
29 March 1995 p. 6

bombed; Ramos banned the sending of Filipino migrant workers to Singapore and established a fact-finding commission to investigate Flor's case; and the Governor's League moved to ban Singapore nationals from their provinces

Flor, mother of four, was hanged in Singapore for double murder. The Singapore court had ignored calls to postpone implementation of the sentence until new testimonies claiming a frame-up could be presented. The execution caused an outpouring of nationalist sentiment across the archipelago, and galvanized Filipinos from all walks of life. The reaction was reminiscent of the heyday of the Marcos regime, when a fact-finding commission was the routine response to public accountability to cover up the fiasco of national government (the murder of opposition senator Nino Aquino); when nationalist sentiment poured onto the street; when an imperial country was identified as the national enemy.

What is the force that crystallizes collective nationalist fervour in a woman's body with enough force to drive it against official discourses of civil rule? This paper investigates the tropes by which such identification with the mother-nation is possible, cinema being one of these tropes. That Flor belongs to a familial and national narrative of the individual who seeks to improve her lot places her in the company of two million Filipino and Filipina overseas workers, and consequently evokes collective sympathy and allegiance. Immediately after the sentence, negotiations were underway to film Flor Contemplacion's life with none less than the country's leading dramatic actress (Nora Aunor) willing to portray her. Aunor's own star status highlights her humble origins and simplicity, and her staying power in the face of adversity.³ Such characteristics are ideal in constructing Flor as the familial citizen, pure victim and spiritual being, providing a centre around which popular discourses of the mother-nation, the *inangbayan*, may cohere. The film eventually became the biggest box-office hit in Philippine history, grossing some P100 million (approximately \$4 million), mostly from its provincial run. It is through mapping social and historical conjuncions such as this that the figure of the mother-nation may appear, opening a space of contestation, at the same time invoking group affiliations and hiding their discords.

3 Part of Aunor's mythology before coming to superstardom is the reiteration of her humble origin selling water to train passengers in a station in the southern region of Luzon. Hers is the popular Cinderella story of a simple woman making it big through hard work and perseverance. Even now her language is punctuated by *po* and *opo*, linguistic signifiers of humility. Her petite size and dark skin defied conventional showbiz requirements attuned to mestiza features.

I want to suggest that the experience of *inangbayan*, the mother-nation – that female cultural representation that inspires people to national feeling and popular struggle – can be related to the experience of the sublime, a category which is itself part of the problematics of Eurocentric discourses. Drawn from Kant, the concept of the sublime may suggest how a temporal event may spark off a massive inspirational feeling, igniting to produce an upsurge of nationalist contestation around the mother-nation. Nationalism as

inscribed in the female body of the mother-nation is, in turn, rewritten into representations of popular history, generating the nation-space of the cultural imaginary of the Philippine nation. However, Kant's notion also provides a limitation to analysis: it is in the very nature of the sublime that it does not lend itself to codification, presenting the moment as self-contained, universal, unrepresentable and ahistorical. This paper examines how *inangbayan* relates to, and provides a disjunctive instance of, the experience of the sublime as mapped in the social and historical relational fields in which the mother-nation has been invoked. I present a genealogy of the mother-nation figure, beginning with earlier mother-nation representations in the iconographic imaging of the Virgin Mary, and the *inangbayan* character in the seditious Tagalog sarsuelas of 1903-5. More recent representations of the mother-nation are inscribed in Corazon Aquino's and Imelda Marcos's positioning as the good/bad mother, and in the Our Lady of EDSA monument on Ortigas Avenue, site of the 1986 'People's Revolution' in the Philippines. It is within this genealogy that the later social drama films of the Filipino filmmaker Lino Brocka can be situated, indicating specific historical practices in the construction of the mother-nation, and linking the experience of *inangbayan* to the violent effects of transnationalism both in Manila's urban space and in the rural peripheries. The films map the discourse of the motherland and the mothering of the nation within the legacy of President Ferdinand Marcos's drive to modernization and his dreams of modernity, dreams which are taken up in the succeeding presidencies of Corazon Aquino and Fidel Ramos. I begin with a brief discussion of the sublime, suggesting that the concept is both vital and limited when applied to a Philippine context. I then proceed with an analysis of the engendering of the mother-nation in two of Lino Brocka's social drama films – *Bayan Ko Kapit sa Patalim/My Country Gripping the Knife's Edge* (1985) and *Orapronobis/Fight for Us* (1989) – in relation to their historical and popular representations of the mother-nation.

In translating '*inangbayan*', I use the term 'mother-nation' in preference to the literal translation 'motherland' to highlight the various critical folds in recent theory which already enfold the polyvocality of engendering the nation. The paper also attempts to foreground some issues in a dialogue between nationalism and feminist thought, a dialectics central to the engendering of the motherland and nationalism.

The sublime in the experience of the mother-nation

Theories of nation and nationalism have come to mobilize the social and historical as a way of materializing the construction of the modern nation-state. Benedict Anderson, for example, historicizes the

4 Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

development of print media as a technology which allowed the nation to be imagined.⁴ As Latin lost its grip as the language of empire following the Reformation, the vernacular became the form in which the call for nation-building was disseminated, using a medium which appealed to the popular imagination. Anderson's notion of the 'meanwhile' suggests a parallel view with the cinema: just as a newspaper reader performs a mass ceremony privately, reading the paper imagining that *meanwhile* other fellow nationals are doing the same, so also cinema functions as both the currency and one of the modern technologies which fuels the imagination of nations.

However, the concept of people imagining themselves as a nation evokes the possibility of unison, but not of discord. The mother-nation presents a different conjunction of nation, nationalism and technology. First, the imagining is not constituted in a routine daily plebiscite, but is affirmed in tangential moments when individual and social emotive levels coalesce to form a force of history. Second, engendered in a female body, the mother-nation becomes Freud's 'dark continent' which defies subjectivity, being open only to subjectification and subjugation. The mother-nation breaks the monotony of daily imagination, and provides a point of rupture in the everyday confirmation of the nation. In Eurocentric terms, the mother-nation is the sublime experience whose constitution is precisely based on its defiance of codification. However, to remove the mother-nation from codification risks essentializing the experience as universal and always already transgressive. My argument attempts to present a 'cognitive map' of the mother-nation as sublime while locating the experience in its social and historical relational spaces.⁵ I want to argue the Eurocentric sublime as symptomatic of a discourse which dehistoricizes experience and the various hierarchies of power and knowledge embedded in it, a discourse which, quite literally, *sublimates* the 'Third World'.

The sublime is individually or collectively experienced as an overwhelming event which the individuals or groups are unable to master or to decipher fully. They have an idea of the event because they have seen its representational form. But its meaning eludes them, they remain uncertain whether the form represents the experience of the Idea. Kant describes the sublime as 'an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to think the unattainability of nature as a presentation of ideas'.⁶ He identifies two divergent concepts: the idea in its unattainable nature, and the (re)presentation of the idea. Lyotard pinpoints the sublime's bind 'the sublime is the child of an unhappy encounter, that of the Idea with form'.⁷ For Lyotard, 'Idea' (nationalism, for example) signifies the uncompromising, the law of the father, while 'form' refers to the representational aspect of the Idea. Form signifies the violation of the law generated by its inherent lack, analogous to Freud's contempt of women for their lack. Lyotard has explained the relationship thus

5 Conceptualized by Fredric Jameson cognitive mapping as defined by Colin MacCabe is the metaphor for the process of the political unconscious. It is also, however, the model for how we might begin to articulate the local and the global. It provides a way of linking the most intimately local – our particular path through the world – and the most global – the crucial features of our particular planet. Colin MacCabe, 'Introduction' in Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (London/Bloomington: British Film Institute/Indiana University Press, 1992), p. xiv.

6 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790) (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), p. 108.

7 Jean François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 180.

he [the law of the father] pushes form aside, or rather, forms part before his presence, tear themselves apart, extend themselves to inordinate proportions. He fertilizes the virgin who has devoted herself to forms, without regard for her favour. He demands regard only for himself, for the law and its realization. He has no need for a beautiful nature. He desperately needs an imagination that is violated, exceeded, exhausted. She will die in giving birth to the sublime. ⁸

8 Ibid

In the context of the mother-nation, Lyotard's sublime can be read as pointing to an ideal of pain and suffering to which nationalism is always already condemned, a sublime in which an ongoing violence is prefigured: '[violence] must be done to the imagination because it is through its pain, through the mediation of its violation, that the joy of seeing or of almost seeing the law is obtained'.⁹ Lyotard goes on to quote Kant on the 'hierarchizing' function of this violence, and its effect: the sublime 'renders almost intuitable the supremacy of our cognitive faculties on the rational side over the greatest faculty of sensibility'. Moreover, the pleasure associated with it 'is only possible through the mediation of displeasure'.¹⁰

The sublime is aligned with reason, contemplation and the mind; its motion, however, is comparable 'to a vibration, that is, to a quickly alternating attraction towards and repulsion from the same object'.¹¹ The sublime's dual direction results from the Idea's inability to be contained, or from the mind's own capacity to elude representation. That the mind, says Lyotard, 'eluding all forms of exemplification, is reserved for Ideas is evinced in the insufficiency and impotence of the faculty of representation'.¹² As such, 'there are no sublime objects but only sublime feelings'.¹³ Referring to the agitation that produces the sublime feeling, Lyotard claims it 'is a transcendental feeling . . . , a paradoxical feeling, like pleasure in pain or even pleasure through pain'.¹⁴

One finds in Lyotard's reading of Kant, among other things, the dragnet of ambivalence in which historically oppressed groups are equally implicated. The sublime experience is deemed an organic entity, self-contained in its expressivity to be indecipherable and unmappable: the sublime therefore precludes the constitution of a space of subjectivity. Homi Bhabha, a leading theorist of postcolonialism, assumes in his work the 'ambivalence' of colonial discourse. Abdul R. JanMohamed correctly raises two ramifications that follow from this assumption: the interchangeability of the colonial subject's position (as both colonizer and colonized), and the repression from the analysis of the continuing violent political history of colonialism.¹⁵ Without jettisoning the concept, the libidinal economy which fuels the sado-masochistic relationship in the sublime needs to be retuned to deal with issues of anti-imperialist and postcolonial critique.

9 Ibid

10 Ibid

11 Jean-François Lyotard
Judiciousness in dispute or
Kant after Marx in A. Benjamin
(ed.) *The Lyotard Reader*
(Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1989)
pp. 326-7

12 Ibid. p. 327

13 Lyotard *Lessons on the Analytic
of the Sublime* p. 182

14 Lyotard Judiciousness in
dispute p. 327

15 Abdul R. JanMohamed. The
economy of manichean allegory
the function of racial difference
in colonialist literature. *Critical
Inquiry* vol. 12 Autumn 1985.

By recasting the sublime in the relational field of nationalist contestation in which this paper locates, the possibility of 'interpellating' (in terms of Slavoj Žižek's rereading of Althusser) the sublime feeling (not the object, as Lyotard would insist) is foregrounded. I propose that this retuning should involve a rewriting of the sublime along the lines of Žižek's critique and reworking of Althusserian ideological interpellation.

... the reverse of the ideological recognition is the misrecognition of the performative dimension. That is to say, when the subject recognizes himself in an ideological call, he automatically overlooks the fact that this very formal act of recognition creates the content one recognizes oneself in. What is missing from the Althusserian account of this gesture of symbolic identification, of recognizing oneself in a symbolic mandate, is that it is a move aimed at resolving the deadlock of the subject's radical uncertainty as to its status (what am I qua object for the Other?). The first thing to do apropos of interpellation in a Lacanian approach is therefore to reverse Althusser's formula of ideology which 'interpellates individuals into subjects': it is on the contrary the subject itself who is interpellated as *x* (some specific subject-position, symbolic identity or mandate).¹⁶

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 73-4.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 75.

In the temporal instance in which the sublime is hailed and interpellated, the sublime experience allows a space for its codification: the space, that is, of its historically particular and culturally specific conditions of existence. Within a 'codifiable' relational field, Žižek proclaims that a 'time for understanding' is opened up, involving 'intersubjectivity' ('transposing oneself into the other's reasoning');¹⁷ and to this I add 'intertextuality' (transposing one's history into the other's as a mode of intersubjectivity). The sublime experience can be interpellated in its relation to other subject positions and to other histories (for example, of 'people without a history'). And in these relational spaces the sublime loses its essentially transgressive connotative field. From this perspective, the sublime of the mother-nation is transformed into a discourse, and discourses, as Arturo Escobar argues (following Foucault) in his critique of developmentalism,

have systematic structures, and they should be studied archaeologically, i.e. by identifying the different elements of which they are composed, and the systems of relations by which these elements form wholes . . . and genealogically . . . those practices of modern culture embodied in specific technologies, their localization in different discourses, institutions and disciplines, and the processes by which they arise and develop.¹⁸

¹⁸ Arturo Escobar, 'Discourse and power in development: Michel Foucault and the relevance of his work to the Third World', *Alternatives: a Journal of World Policy* vol. 10 no. 30 (1984-5), p. 379.

The genealogy of the mother-nation as discourse provides the specific historical and cultural contexts both to analyse the sites and modes of

production of the representation of the mother-nation, and to present a counter-discourse to Eurocentrism from which it has traditionally been posed

My intention in the following section is to use Brocka's films as a way of cognitively mapping the affects of the mother-nation as sublimity. I will foreground how the discursive gendering in the positioning of the mother-nation functions as an affect generated to stir the nationalist sublime or the sublime of nation-ness. The identification of women as mother-nation involves a dialectics of positioning between the relational field of the nationalist sublime (engrained in various nodes of the trajectories of Philippine history) and the transnational affect of such representations (emphasis on the experience from within rather than from outside the Philippines).

Lino Brocka's discourse of *inangbayan*

¹⁹ Roy Armes: *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) p. 153

²⁰ *Bayan Ko Kapit sa Patalim* was shown at the 1984 Cannes International Film Festival and shared with *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, China, 1984) the best film of the year award from the British Film Institute. Lyn Pareja writes: Controversy attended the film's entry to the Philippines when it was denied an exhibition permit on the grounds that the film was subversive (inciting to rebellion). After much hue and cry and protests from the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP) [a group co-founded and initially headed by Brocka], the subversive charge was withdrawn and the film was permitted entry, but the censors wanted to cut the film because of alleged lascivious scenes. Brocka and Malaya Films filed suit in the Supreme Court. When the decision came down, the censors were ordered to approve its showing to adult audiences (persons over 18 years of age) and not to cut any portion from the film because it was mandated only to classify and not the cut films. (Manuscript *Encyclopaedia of Philippine Arts and Culture* Film Volume forthcoming)

Lino Brocka (1939–91) is still considered the most overtly political director ever to emerge in Philippine cinema. He is the 'most forceful and dynamic of [the] generation of younger filmmakers'¹⁹ to emerge at the point at which Philippine cinema was generating international awareness and when Marcos was achieving international notoriety. Set in clearly defined localities (small factory, town or slum area, for example), his social drama films in particular reflect the national political turmoil during the Marcos dictatorship and the succeeding Aquino administration.

*Bayan Ko Kapit sa Patalim*²⁰ tells the story of Turing, a labourer in a printing shop struggling to raise the money to pay the hospital bills of his newly born child. During a strike in the shop, Turing, in desperation, succumbs to a friend's plan to rob the owners. While the robbery is taking place, police are called in and surround the factory, with the media in attendance. Luz, Turing's wife, hears the news in the hospital and rushes to the scene. She appeals to Turing, who decides to surrender, but is prevented from doing so by his friend. A shootout between police and robbers ensues. Turing is taken into custody. While being escorted to the police car, a foreman berates Turing, and Turing grabs a gun and shoots the man. Turing, in turn, is fired upon. The last scene is a medium shot of a confused and helpless Luz holding Turing's bloodied face on her lap. Camera bulbs flash constantly, for a few seconds, only the media announcers' voices are heard. The shot continues minus any soundtrack, focusing on Luz's anguish.

The final scene concretizes Luz's position as the body in which to inscribe the nation-space. Her position has made her a witness; the media has made her a victim. Confused and belligerent, she remains pure; mute, she is spoken for. An intertextual reference to the Pieta, the mater dolorosa, the weeping and suffering mother, is easily

accessible by a dominantly Catholic population like the Philippines. With Spain's colonization of the Philippines, the Virgin Mary became the measure of ideal femininity, and motherhood became the utmost mark of having achieved this ideal.

It is no accident that the plot's inherent tension is generated at the juncture of two spatial planes – the factory and the home. The regimented lives of factory employees doing gendered and hierarchic work are introduced in the opening sequence. The only respite allowed in this space is lunchbreak. Luz breaks the spatial and temporal pace of the factory, fainting because she is pregnant. By introducing a domestic issue, she has tainted the work sphere and disturbed its rhythm. In turn, she is alienated from this sphere. Having had two miscarriages in the past, she is consigned to the home and the hospital, and can only re-enter the work space in extraordinary circumstances. As well as being the condition that consigns her to the domestic sphere, her pregnancy becomes the condition which makes Turing dependent on the capitalist's side of the labour economy; for it is in preparation for the birth of a new child that Turing signs a waiver not to join a union, making him a scab when the union calls a strike. And it is the pregnancy and the growing hospital fees which force Turing to agree to his lumpen friend's plan. In other words, the woman is made to confine the man from forms of class organization, popular mobilization or anti-imperialist movement.

The political is inserted into Luz's pregnancy. A former student activist, her condition prevents her from participating directly in the union. When Turing hits Luz after a bitter argument about whether or not he should accept wage benefits from the foreman, Luz prematurely gives birth. From this point on, it is all downhill for Turing. As a filmic device, Luz's premature delivery signals the collapse of the local system in favour of macropolitics. The factory closes shop; hospital bills build up. A larger political context replaces the microlevel. When Turing bids goodbye to a former co-worker, the scene is shot against the backdrop of an actual anti-government rally. Larger bodies of people replace the local strike scene which was easily dismantled by police threats, goons and Marcos's stringent strike rules. In short, Luz's conception, pregnancy, premature birth and mothering is echoed in the cycle of life and death in the economic sphere. The figure of Luz allows for the transformation into macropolitics, and the call for meaningful change. Turing does not follow this trajectory, but remains trapped in the local. His internalization of social ills (to the lower depths, so to speak) cause his downfall: he cannot make the connections which explain why prices of (imported) medicines soar, why a private hospital will not release Luz and their son (they are victims of the hospital's own economic hold-up), or why people participate in mass actions. Through his non-recognition of the larger public sphere, Turing stumbles and causes his own downfall. Luz is not implicated because

she is consigned to the domestic sphere; she is not expected to act (despite her history of activism) or to move out of this sphere. Luz's figure can only witness Turing's downfall into the prototypical narrative of a 'good man drawn to evil for lack of economic opportunity'.

The title of the film also suggests two other culturally specific intertextual references that present the possibility of materializing nationalist sentiment. First is the nationalist song, *Bayan Ko (My Country)*²¹ which became the anthem for the nationalist people's movements. *Bayan Ko* anthropomorphizes in a caged bird the condition and desire of a politically repressed citizenry. In the film, the song is invoked four times: it is sung by a group of drinkers near Turing and Luz's home, by protest marchers in a middle- and upper-class demonstration, by workers while Turing and other scabs are resting, and by marchers in a militant mass demonstration. On the one hand, the song calls on a progression from lumpen degeneracy (a theme to which Brocka constantly returns) to class militancy; on the other hand, it appeals to transcendental class equivalence. In contrast, *Tie a Yellow Ribbon* – a song intended for Senator Ninoy Aquino's homecoming, but transformed into a middle- and upper-class protest song after Ninoy's assassination on the airport tarmac – was initially popular but fizzled out when 'yellow' politics seemed an insufficient response to the continuing Marcos repression. *Bayan Ko* proved to be a more class-consolidating anthem. However, *Bayan Ko* also became a site for class-based contestations around the nation space when (at least) three versions of the song's resolution evolved. The leftish faction, for example, ended the song with the refrain, 'The east skies turn red', directed to a social upheaval for change; the ending of the middle- and upper-class version pointed to a more peaceful mode of social transition. After the 1986 'People's Revolution' which forced the Marcoses into exile, giant companies were only too eager to use the song for their advertisements, coming up with more versions of the middle- and upper-class take on the ending. In the context of this contestation, Brocka's *Bayan Ko Kapit sa Patalim* positions Luz as the caged bird of freedom, withstanding pain and suffering for the sake of the possibility of social change in some not so distant future. The caged bird metaphor is, of course, the figure of the mother-nation. On the one hand, the mother-nation is to remain in agony over inflicted pain and suffering – and the cage signifies her anguish; on the other hand, the mother-nation is to remain pure – and the cage signifies her protection.

The second intertextual reference emerges in the second half of the title, *Kapit sa Patalim (Gripping the Knife's Edge)* which comes from a popular saying 'Ang taong nagigipit, kahit sa patalim ay kumakapit' ('A desperate individual will grip the knife's edge in order to survive'). The saying was highly politicized during the Marcos dictatorship. It provided a popular logic to support the possibility of

²¹ The song *Bayan ko* originally owed music to Constancio de Guzman and lyrics to Jose Corazon de Jesus. It is a song of lamentation a people's offering to Inangbayan's plight and wishful dream of seeing her free. For a detailed discussion of the song's evolution see Antonio Hila's entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Philippine Arts* Volume of Philippine Music (Manila Cultural Center of the Philippines 1994) pp 228–9.

insurgence when all else failed, as the regime's last years seemed to indicate it would. For the middle and upper class who were also feeling the economic crunch, the protest option proved to be a viable one that eventually culminated in the middle-class character of the 1986 'People's Revolution'. But the saying seems to be addressed to the lumpen subclass to which Brocka has consistently had a strong affiliation, showing a sympathy for those who run foul of the system as an alternative to the Marcos order – even to the point of self-destruction. What is being worked out in *Bayan Ko* is the connection between the dual spaces of oppression: the slum and the factory, the micro- and the macro-struggles where each becomes the figure of the larger system in which it is inscribed. The printing shop, as a subcontractor of prescribed elementary textbooks in the national public school system, is part of the same order which also includes the development apparatus of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Viewing the film now, and in the context of the song's diminished popularity, Brocka was still able to inscribe in the figure of Luz a 'writing of history of the present' in the unattainable future past: the promised social change has yet to come but the figure of the suffering mother-nation is still powerful in nationalistic politics. In the film's last scene, Luz both attracts and repels. She becomes the haunted figure of the mother-nation sublimity, a trope of spectatorial attraction and repulsion in nationalist thought. On the one hand, the figure of the pure and the ideal, on the other, of the perennial unattainability of the full nationalist ideal, Luz represents a potential leftist political space which figures the possibility of significant change.

²² M. Tajan writes 'because it is openly critical of the Aquino government *Orapronobis* has not been shown in commercial theatres (Manuscript *Encyclopaedia of Philippine Arts and Culture* Film Volume forthcoming). The film was screened out of competition at the Cannes International Film Festival.

Orapronobis,²² on the other hand, returns to notions of macropolitics by examining human rights violations in the immediate post-Marcos era. The story begins when a foreign priest is shot and killed without motivation by the leader of a religious vigilante organisation. (In the original version, the cult leader goes on to skewer the priest's brain and eat it.) The shock opening is immediately absorbed by the beginning aerial video shot of a huge mass of bodies of people in the 'People's Revolution'. The credits continue by intersplicing documentary footage of the emotional faces of civil and secular forces during the upheaval. Jimmy, an ex-priest and alleged rebel, is released from prison and marries Trixie, a human rights activist. Esper's first appearance is as a darkened image on television, presenting testimony of the brutal massacre of her husband and other villagers by the cult group. Jimmy becomes a member of the fact-finding team in the village only to find that Esper, who had been his partner while in the underground movement, has borne him a son. At this point, Trixie is expecting their first child.

Because of increasing military and paramilitary harassment that further endangers the villagers, they are transferred first to the provincial city, and then to Manila. The move to the city further

intensifies the narrative. Jimmy is shot and Trixie's brother dies; the villagers are rounded up again by the military; Esper and her child are abducted in broad daylight and in full view of the media. Esper is tortured, then raped by the cult leader Commandant Kontra. Her son attempts to avenge her with a toy sword Jimmy had given him, but is shot by Kontra. Esper grabs a gun and shoots the cult leader. She is machine gunned, together with the other refugees abducted from the Manila camp. The last sequence shows Jimmy finding Esper's and his son's bodies. He clutches his son, silently moves towards the church altar, and sits on the nearest pew. A nun requests that the media respect Jimmy's grief. With the sound of the wind in the church, Jimmy's face in medium shot registers shock and contempt. There is a cut to Jimmy's home, with Jimmy staring at Trixie and their infant sleeping soundly in the bedroom. He moves to the study, dials the phone using a code given to him by an underground colleague, he will rejoin the movement.

The mother-nation is inscribed in two figures according to class and spatial differences. While Jimmy invokes the materiality of the struggle, Trixie and Esper signify its contradictory spiritual drives. Trixie, the urban, upper-class human rights activist, is riddled with political contradictions emanating from a primal fear of separation from Jimmy, who finally decides to break away from the middle-class familial bonds to rejoin the underground movement. Esper, the rural, lower-class sympathizer, is represented as having fewer individualistic contradictions and a more active concern for justice and human rights. The women are allowed space only to present the contradiction of class background (the human weakness in Trixie), or to provide the case for human rights activism (the death of Esper). Despite having witnessed her brother's death, Trixie takes an uncompromising stand for the family and against turning his funeral into a political cause. Representing the female bourgeois individual caught between an oppressive state power and the underground mass movement, Trixie's in-between position leaves very little ground for sympathy. Her class and gender determine her wavering personal commitment: she maintains her belief in the struggle only so long as it does not directly exact a price from her.

On the other hand, it is also Esper's class and gender which pigeonhole her for martyrdom. She is singled out as the only woman to die in the film. Her genuine concern for issues of social change on the one hand, and her lower-class and female status on the other, make her an ideal candidate for memorialization. It is worth noting that the memorialization does not take place in the film, but within the filmic experience of the spectator. In the film, her body, though singled out, becomes just a part of the growing number of human rights abuses. The memorialization takes place metafilmically: the death of the mother-nation is sublime, attracting and repulsing the spectator. Within the film, Esper is abused, tortured and raped. In this final

violation, a double standard is at stake: enforced sexual contact connotes the possibility of engendering a 'bastard' nation. The mother-nation, after all, has to remain sexually pure. Esper's martyrdom at the hands of her violators is the only way out of the double bind. Her death is dually marked by a sense of justice – she avenges the death of her son – and injustice – the killing of the villagers who are implicated in Esper's just action. Esper's introduction into the public sphere as a darkened image providing testimony of the cult's atrocities in the village foregrounded her status as the anonymous woman who speaks. She is only partly visible; her mediated voice is her only access to herself. Ironically, it is this mediated voice which dooms her. She speaks to be spoken for: filmically, as another statistic in human rights violation; metafilmically, as the voice through which the mother-land is made audible and visible, then silent and invisible.

Though they remain problematic figures in filmic representations, these speaking women evolve from the *inangbayan* character of the seditious Tagalog sarsuelas, or nationalist dramas, of 1903–5.²³ To deal with anti-colonial insurgency in the Philippines, the USA had imposed anti-nationalist laws. The Sedition Law, for example, banned for the most part anything that tended to 'incite the people of the Philippine Islands to open and armed resistance to the constituted authorities'.²⁴ The display of the Philippine flag and the performance of sarsuela were banned. The Filipino cultural critic, Vicente Rafael writes of the seditious quality of the plays and the productions:

In order to evade colonial surveillance, theatrical groups relied on such tactics as publicizing the plays under different titles, staging impromptu songs and speeches advocating Philippine sovereignty, and dressing the cast in costumes which, when brought into formation on the stage, momentarily created an image of the outlawed Philippine flag. They used visual props such as the rising red sun, symbolic of the revolutionary organization, the Katipunan, that had led the revolution against Spain, and structured their stories as allegories of romance and kinship to invoke recollections of events and to provoke sympathy (*damay*) with the sufferings of the 'motherland' (*inangbayan*).²⁵

The epigraph to this article is an example of provoking *damay*. The lines are offered to the motherland, who in turn is to mimic a similar syntax to the people (*taumbayan*), to stir them into passionate and familial nationalism. The motherland is also victim of the violations inflicted upon her, yet in the sarsuela's epilogues she is able to rouse nationalist ideals. In other words, though victimized, she is also allowed to speak on behalf of the nation. She posits hope for the engendering of a free and independent nation.

As such, mothering prefigures the articulation of the nation-space, inscribing the nation with essential purity, on the one hand, and on the

²³ While the *zarzuela* refers to the Spanish drama form, *sarsuela* as identified by Filipino cultural critics refers to its indignant Philippine form.

²⁴ Quoted in Vicente L. Rafael, 'White love, surveillance and nationalist resistance in the US colonization of the Philippines' in Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (eds) *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) p. 206.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 207.

other, with the capacity symbolically to conceive and give birth to a counter-offspring of the official Nation. In the film, Esper's pregnancy with Jimmy's child is a secret maintained by her legal husband who had chosen to marry her, even in that condition, to protect her from public criticism. Read inversely, her husband was also protecting the public sphere from the contamination of Esper's domestic condition. Trixie's conservative stance towards Jimmy's public activities (and, in the beginning of the film, her 'adoption' of Jimmy as himself a human rights cause) are indicative and reiterative of how mothering has been culturally invoked through and upon her. Though mothering represents an ideal of preservation and protection, the women made to represent the mother-nation evoke this ideal not for themselves but for others. Esper dies for her son rather than live with his absence. Trixie, on the other hand, is able to withstand the abduction and murder of the people close to her. As an invocation of the fatherland, it is then up to Jimmy to draw from the spiritual anguish of the women, and give to the nationalist struggle a material dimension.

Drawing from the sarsuela tradition, the film is able to quote current events and offer points of identification for the more politically attuned spectator. It provides a catalogue of historical events of the period, a memory bank of events to be matched against actual historical figures, punctuating with proper names (Dante Buscayno, Fr. Tulio Favali, Benjamin Pascual, Mary Concepcion Bautists, and so on) the common names and incidents (murdered, abducted, salvaged, turncoat . . .). In doing so, the film becomes a historical map at the point of transition, signposting things to come if the atrocities persist. Jimmy, like Turing (both portrayed by Philip Salvador), is left with no other recourse than to risk separation from his family in order to improve his family's and his society's conditions in the long run. Esper, like Luz (both portrayed by Gina Alajar), is made to witness family and social atrocity, and to represent society's suffering in the end.

The film also offers a writing of the history of the present, implying the interconnectedness of macropolitical structures. Among the junctures are the anti-Marcos cardinal who endorsed the proliferation of vigilante groups in Aquino's regime; the common usage of 'stainless' (aluminium) jeeps as police vehicles, highlighting the fear instilled by their presence; the transformation of anticolonial millenarian or nativistic movements at the turn of the century into anticommunist cult groups during the Aquino administration. With the exception of the death of Esper, the brutal killing of civilians deromanticizes human death, transforming romantic martyrdom into protest; the media represent the opening and closing of the 'democratic space' in the early Aquino era. The title (literally, 'pray for us') provides a pessimistic reading of the repetitious and monotonous cycles of bourgeois leadership unless, or until, a nationalist break takes place.²⁶ The film's quotation of actual history serves as a mnemonic device for nationalist aspiration.

²⁶ Before his death Brocka had planned *Orapornobis* as the first of a trilogy of political films the other two films were to be about women political prisoners and their children. Interestingly the title of the next film would have been *Miserere Nobis* another response in offertory prayers to the Virgin Mary and the Saints

The centrality of Esper and Luz as witnesses to history function to position a 'meta-spectator'. For the spectator is witnessing two histories: the one unfolding on the screen in the film's narrative; the other which the film quotes, the actual events and people – the proper names and historical details – which constitute the film's nationalist agenda. In relation to this larger history, in *Orapronobis* Brocka shifts from his traditional realism to a socialist realism, positing armed struggle as the only instrument for genuine social change. The film was made at the point at which Aquino was perpetuating Marcos's authoritarian legacy, shifting from the earlier promise to be 'the total opposite of Marcos'. The Left's general scepticism after the 'February Revolution' was confirmed by Aquino's move to replace Marcos's cronies with her own set of family relations and political allies.

The 'good mothering' earlier ascribed to Corazon Aquino divided the ranks of the nationalist movement on whether to be supportive or to remain critical, whether to support the centre or remain in the margins. The initial construction was based on the martyrdom of her slain husband; her widow status had to be maintained as pure through pain and suffering. Her position as treasurer manager of the family corporation, Hacienda Luisita, one of the largest corporations in the country, was not mentioned, fostering the notion that the nation itself was her sole commitment. The establishment of yellow (related to the song, *Tie a Yellow Ribbon*) as her colour signified simplicity and provided immediate identification. When in power, her good mothering was constructed in opposition to the 'bad mothering' of Imelda Marcos ('amassing 3,000 pairs of shoes while the poor went hungry'), an opposition which was heavily played in the trials over the former First Family's hidden wealth. Nonetheless, Imelda's own widow status would catapult her back into popularity with a respectable standing in the 1992 Presidential election. After all, was she not also martyred by having to withstand trial and interrogation, and by Aquino's refusal to allow her to bring Marcos's body back to the Philippines immediately after his death?²⁷ In the middle of her administration, Aquino's image as good mother was finally eroded by her bad housekeeping sense. By this time, with the continuation of most of Marcos's policies, inflation, unemployment and underemployment had soared; human rights abuses reached their worst levels; political stability evaded her as she shuffled her cabinet several times; her term witnessed daily twelve-hour blackouts; the worst levels of traffic congestion and uncollected trash; the list could go on and on. Aquino's slide was summed up in her disenchantment with the colour yellow, and 'yellow politicking' was associated with her eventual turn to greater conservatism. It was almost inevitable, following a family narrative, that the next to hold the reins of power would be a man who was imagined to be capable of instilling order in a crumbling house. Fidel Ramos, Aquino's personal choice, became

²⁷ It was only during Ramos's Presidential term that Imelda was able to bring Marcos's remains to Ilocos, home province of Ferdinand Marcos, not to bury the body but to exhibit it.

President, and immediately marked his era with decisive action quite distinct from Aquino's wavering stances

Brocka's montage and framing with their quotations from actual history provide the context in which connections with the social are to be drawn. The framing that quotes a current political signifier calls attention to the larger regime and institutions within which the film's narrative is set, allowing him to elaborate a representation of the mother-nation that draws from the tension between popular and hegemonic cultures. Brocka's attempt to position the national sublime in individual and social relational fields historicizes the conditions in which the sublime experience emanates. By placing experience under the rubric of the uncodifiable, the sublime erases the enforcement of epistemic and literal violence. Brocka's films can be read as working to present a contrast to the Eurocentric undertaking of the sublime. Experience neither simply yields to spectacularization nor to the emotive and uninterpretable level of awe. Instead, experience deconstructs the auratic (Benjamin); Brocka's films provide a critique of the sublime as a metaphysical and transgressive experience devoid of a social basis from which it arose and is disseminated. His films do not codify the sublime but present the relational and historical fields in which it emanated, providing the social conjunction in which to analyse experience and modes of experiencing.

Women and the mothering of the nation

In the conjunction of the emotional and social levels, the nationalist populist figure of the mother-nation has been utilized to break the everyday experience of the abject. However, Brocka's films do not completely answer the problematics involved in the positioning of women as mother-nation. In order to further analyse the spatial engendering of the mother-nation, I want to turn to Partha Chatterjee's problematization of the women's issue in nationalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indian politics.²⁸ Chatterjee contrasts the *ghar* (home) and the *bahir* (world) to elaborate on earlier dichotomies of nationalism: materiality/spirituality, outer/inner, man/woman. For him, 'the world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity'. Furthermore, 'the home is the essence [and] must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation'.²⁹ Despite the western world's subjugation of the colonized's material world, nationalists thought that they were at least able to maintain the sanctity of the spiritual – the last uncolonized frontier. In waging the goal of national independence, however, nationalists had to learn the signposts of the material world: modern sciences, classical arts and so on. Chatterjee, however, makes it clear that the spiritual aspect remained grounded in the nationalist

²⁸ Partha Chatterjee 'The nation and its women' *The Nation and its Fragments Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press 1993). See also his essay 'The nationalist resolution of the woman question' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds) *Recasting Women Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women n.d.)

²⁹ Chatterjee 'The nation and its women' p 120

³⁰ Ibid p 121

project: 'in the entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve, and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence'.³⁰ Political contestation is waged in the world, while the home remains pure and unblemished.

In *Bayan Ko*, Luz had to be contained in the home while Turing maintained connections with both the domestic and the work spheres (the world). Turing could easily invoke both personal and political issues to explain himself to the media while holding the owner's wife and kids hostage: to get a decent job paying enough to cover the hospital bills (the domestic concern), and to get jobs for the workers (the political concern). He is able to act as bridge between these worlds. His weakness lies in not being himself able to make connections between his personal and social conditions. In the powerful image of Luz as grieving woman in the film's last sequence, she is made to bear the suffering, a recourse to the traditional (religious and colonial) values of the good virginal woman. In *Orapronobis*, Trixie and Esper attain a superior consciousness to that expected of their gender and class. Chatterjee suggests that the 'attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the mark of woman's newly acquired freedom'.³¹ Thus Trixie and Esper are able to move through spaces, experience modernity in different modes, and accept the different conditions in which they have loved the same man. But the superior national culture being suggested by the film is the underground movement to which only Jimmy has access. Esper and Trixie support the armed struggle but are only able to move freely 'above ground'.

In both films, the home is displaced from its physical confines once the essential femininity has been embodied and its characteristics interiorized. However, there are other displacements at work in the construction of this nation-space through women. In *Bayan Ko*, there are two women strippers who are linked to the lumpen character who masterminds the printing shop robbery. The highly sexualized portrayal of these women serves primarily to provide a contrast with the good woman, the one worthy of an immaculate conception of the nation-space: 'here is one more instance of the displacement in nationalist ideology of the construct of woman as a sex object . . . the nationalist male thinks of his own wife/sister/daughter as "normal" precisely because she is not a "sex" object, while those who could be "sex objects" are not normal'.³² In this same film, a Chinese Filipino couple is racialized as the evil male capitalist and the female embodiment of capitalist excess, reinforcing the rich/Scrooge Chinese ethnic stereotype in the Philippines.³³ Similarly, by characterizing the wife as an excessive nouveau riche powerful woman, Brocka was parodying Imelda. However, such racialized and gendered constructions of the privileged family reinforce a misdirected nationalism which falsely argues for a radically pure Filipino genealogy.

³² Ibid p 132

³³ Such stereotypical portrayal of Chinese ethnicity has created a backlash with the recent wave of kidnapping of people of Chinese background. The syndicates were working on the notion that all Chinese were rich. As most families could not afford to pay the huge ransoms demanded many of the kidnapped victims were killed by their abductors.

Chatterjee posits an autonomous sphere within colonialism as already a period of nationalism, the domain of the spiritual as its sovereign territory: 'The nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power.'³⁴ Such a move opens spaces from which to analyse further the multiple fissures of nation and nationalism. *Orapronobis*, for example, points to two levels of nation drawn from the anti-US tradition of sarsuela theatre at the turn of the century. By incorporating generic historical events and personalities, the film presents a play of association and naming to its different audiences. The 'general' spectator finds a political discourse present at the abstract level, but the more politically attuned is able to register a concrete present history. In this way, the films construct an 'inner' and 'outer' community within its invocation of the nation. My stress, in using this Brocka film as an example, is to make more specific how film constructs multiple visions of nation and nationalism. A dialectics of the inside/outside is not simply a further (poststructuralist) destabilization of the subject. As it refers to nation and cinema, inside/outside refers to a double access to the nation: the invoked nation, and the figure of its other, hegemonic or subaltern identity. As it refers to nation and community, nation represents the 'baseline' membership while community connotes belongingness through the structures of subalternity. However, community can also represent 'bad' nationalism (for example, ethnic lumpen gangs and neo-nazism). The notion of community, Chatterjee suggests, further interrogates the position of the nation and modernity 'from within itself'.

The Home and the World (Satyajit Ray, India, 1984) presents an analogous instance of the working of Chatterjee's concept. At the husband's insistence, the woman undertakes a training in manners. The husband's friend, a rebel, is fascinated by the woman as the epitome of a future mother India. Thus, the woman's entry into modernity embodies the vision of a free India. However, while waiting for this future, the woman remains (spiritually) pure, as only the men participate in the movement for (material) independence. Gandhi's call for women to participate in the nationalist struggle brought women into the nationalist conjunction. However, once independence was gained, there was a tacit assumption that women would return to their homes. Furthermore, the usage of Hindu religious iconography as signifiers of the motherland, despite the presence of Muslims in the film narrative, provides an inside/outside alignment of the nation. Through the iconography, the Hindu spectator discovers a stronger affinity to the filmic nation than the Muslim spectator: the film constructs its own hierarchy of national membership. Such a dialectics may also find a resonance in the reception and analysis of Third-World films outside their immediate national contexts. The reading of *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomas Gutierrez, Cuba, 1968), whether as a critique of socialism or capitalism, implies an

inside/outside. The structure of inner/outer position has repercussions on theories of spectatorship, ideology, sex and gender, race and ethnicity, and, of course, nations and nationalisms. Consideration of this dialectics of inside/outside within the discourse of the nation allows for the rethinking of membership of a social formation – as citizen or dissident, as native or foreigner, as transient or permanent resident, as local or tourist. In other words, it is a dialectics which allows for subject positions that have not been visible at the start.

The mother-nation is also constructed in her child, the embodiment of the future nation. In *Bayan Ko*, Luz's child is detained in the hospital for non-payment of bills. This can be allegorically read as the mortgage of the Philippines to the IMF-WB that has been perceived as the real administrator of the economy and whose policies trickle down to the daily lives of the people. Deprived of her husband and her child, Luz embodies the turmoils of nationalist struggle which she can only redeem through her own efforts (or that can be redeemed for her through collective efforts). In *Orapronobis*, Esper's murdered child is juxtaposed with Trixie's child, comfortably sleeping in bed. Both children are the problematic representation of the nation's future. Esper's child is transformed into the spiritual idea which fuels Jimmy's decision to rejoin the armed struggle. Jimmy leaves behind his child with Trixie. The future nation is to be attained only by waiting for others to struggle, a reference to most of the middle class who withdrew participation and support in the post-Marcos struggle.

The women in the two films are tied to both the mothering of the child and the care of the husband. Woman's consignment to the domestic sphere is part of her function of caring for the spiritual aspect of the nation as it is materially enforced by the men. In the end, the call for material social change takes centre stage in nation-building. The women, therefore, form the backdrop, inspiring the people to change the social structures or to supporting them when they remain wallowing in society's abject condition. Thus the women signify both the inspiration for change and the condition of suffering while the nation awaits change. The engendering of women as mother-nation invokes care of the domestic sphere as the site of their participation in the struggle to free the nation. The women mark the place where the future nation is to be born and to be cared for.

Two correlative issues are at stake in the mothering of the nation. First, the impossibility of the virgin nation is implied as the very function of mothering involves a passage from innocence to the realization of the nation's abject condition. The future nation is the culmination of the violent enforcement of change, a necessity which Brocka increasingly recognizes as the experience of the Marcos dictatorship slides into the dismal performance of Aquino's regime. Second, a post-familial narrative is also implied as the family forced into dysfunction is made to carry the heavy weight of nation-building. Brocka was moving away from the utopian view of the united family

as allegorical of a united nation, realizing that social stratification disintegrates the family unit. Yet fragments of the family articulate both the hope and the pain involved in the building of a future nation, with each fragment calling for collectivity in the struggle for change. The cohesion of the family is replaced by a social coalition under the imperative of collective struggle.

The mother-nation implies a 'double sublime' in its placement of the uncodifiable in a non-existent nation and in the female subject. A further connection with more recent contestations for the mother-nation provides interesting insights into the configuration of global transnationalism and Philippine cultural dynamics. In drawing these connections between religion, nationalism and modernity in the analysis of the mother-nation, I am situating these discourses in the transnational frame as they are experienced from within the Philippine nation setting. This furthers my mapping of the relational fields in which the mother-nation as sublime is implicated, and in turn, implies other discursive circuits.

Mother-nation and transnationalism from within

In the aftermath of the 1986 'February Revolution', a giant golden statue (about thirty feet tall) known as Our Lady of EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos Avenue – Metropolitan Manila's premier highway) was commissioned from sculptor Virginia T. Navarro to act as a signpost commemorating the historical shift of power to Aquino. It also served to mark the Catholic Church's crucial role in mobilizing people, Aquino's coming into office via a people-powered 'revolution', the middle-class stamp of approval for the 'revolution', and the burgeoning business and real estate complex sprawling in the area. Fidel Ramos, one of the leaders of the 'revolution', revelled in this highway, inaugurating more monumental tableaux of various 'people-power' motifs all focusing the iconography of the motherland as the crux of the historic change and the nation's continuing unifying force. At the tail end of the Aquino administration, because of traffic congestion along the EDSA highway, several flyovers were quickly built. With no monumental structures to her credit (unlike the monumental binges of the Marcos dictatorship), Aquino consoled herself with having produced these structures as concrete markers of her administration's achievement. And indeed, each flyover bears a historical plate assigning presidential authorship to its construction.

The flyovers initially decongested traffic, only to further congest it because of their structural preference for private cars. Bus stops create a bottle-neck at the bottom of the interchange. Lately, it has become common for cars to be stuck in traffic on the flyovers. A Filipina critic wrote of the social relationship between flyovers and the movement of transnational capital in Manila

Flyovers realize the transnational conceptualization space of [the] community not only by serving as a site of symbolic identification, but also by concretizing the socio-economic network of the national bourgeoisie, that is, of the classes with access and links to the transnational economy – they are its means of production. Flyovers connect shopping areas, foreign-invested malls, commercial and business centres, and exclusive residential neighbourhoods, channelling consumption to corporate-owned spaces, and integrating its managerial class. In this differentiation of urban space – enabling middle and upper class better, more efficient means of commuting as well as raising them out of their urban immersion in the contradictory conditions of their economic upliftment – the flyover restructuration is a part of the process of reproducing uneven development, ‘the systematic geographical expression in the contradictions inherent in the very constitution and structure of capital’ (Daniele Daniela, *Mapless Cities Urban Displacement and Failed Encounters in Surrealist and Postmodern Narratives*, Dissertation, City University of New York, 1992, p. xi). In other words, flyovers physically realize the new division of labour in which First World–Third World or core–periphery relations are being produced within rather than among nations (Richard Applebaum and Gary Gereffi, ‘Power and profits in the apparel commodity chain’, unpublished manuscript). On this view, it is the network, rather than any downtown centre, which constitutes the space of the national economy.³⁵

³⁵ Neferti Xina M Tadiar ‘Manila’s new metropolitan form’ *differences* vol 5 no 3 (1993) pp 160–1

The middle- and upper-class experience of the Virgin Mary statue could be the symbol of two different experiences; passing through the recent EDSA history at speed, or being stuck in history as traffic comes to a standstill. Either way, history is seen from above: the statue is reduced to reproduction as one of the souvenir goods dotting the family altars along the EDSA. From below, public commuters bear the gaze of the Virgin Mary, reminded of the ideals of the good woman. But the statue is positioned on top of a chapel which forms its base, and thus it is only when the commuter is positioned above street level that her gaze can be seen. The Virgin has ceased to structure the gaze of control.

Annual celebrations in EDSA are held at the balcony of the chapel. From the perspective of dignitaries on the balcony, the flyover is an alien intrusion into the historicity of EDSA. For the annually dwindling numbers of participants at the bases of both the flyover and the stature, the celebrations become an excuse to drop by the mall. The huge shopping complex has served as backdrop to the statue: the land site was offered free by the mall developer, a member of the Filipino oligarchs. In preparation for the opening celebration of a MacDonald franchise, a huge air balloon of the Ronald MacDonald clown mascot was placed on top of the mall, further defacing the field

of vision within the Virgin Mary image. The clown's buoyancy is quite different from the solidity of the statue. But like the clown's 'feel good' effect, the spirituality invoked in the chapel is also attempting to accommodate a consumerist 'feel good' economy, allowing a quick drop-in for prayer any time of the day. The statue's chapel is about the same size as a burger outlet.

Thus even the official nationalism of EDSA and the 1986 'People's Revolution' has immediately become an alien space. It is only through the counter-use of the space in the days prior to the anniversary that nationalist politics enters the historical highway. Left-wing groups staged their own rememorializing of EDSA as a wasted opportunity of social liberation and as a possibility for another upheaval. The authorities, however, policed the actual area centres, marking out some margins of EDSA as sites of leftist contestation. That the Left was left out (choosing to boycott the 1986 'snap' Presidential elections) has been a recurring rationale for the hegemonic power to marginalize the Left's space. At the same time, the refurbishing of the EDSA mythology through the newer monuments constructed along the highway is also a hegemonic attempt to retain the monopolistic hold over the nationalism that ensued from the 1986 'People's Revolution'. In official nationalism, the mother-nation is drained of its potential by the operations of recent transnational capitalism. In populist nationalism, newer images of the mother-nation have to evolve, or to generate the affect of the sublime. Locked in this grid, the reworking of the mother-nation remains part of the masculine contestation for the right to speak for, and on behalf of, an imagined or constructed nation.

Brocka has demonstrated in his film that his nation is invariably a Third-World formation positioned in the global division of labour.³⁶ The Third World is the ultimate sublime, manifesting the West's fascination with, and disavowal of, the experience of modern colonialism. Under a reductionist logic, this sublime becomes the only way to name an experience which it cannot fully define. Similarly, the historical positioning of the Third World in western discourse positions it in the margins of power – knowledge, becoming the colonial space which defines the experience of the self through the other. The Third World is synonymous with the colonialist desire to appropriate the Other for its own subjectivity. As the mother-nation has been enmeshed especially in the developments of nationalism, multinationalism and transnationalism, on the one level the Third World is able to predicate its own subjectivity within the context of its own nationalist struggle and, on another, the grid of transnationalism provides the interfacing of the nation with the regional and the global, another relational space in the refiguring of the sublime within specific historical and cultural contexts.

This essay benefited from the comments of Ana Lopez, Peter Britos and Maria Luisa Aguilar Carriño.

The Society for Cinema Studies Conference, Dallas, 7–10 March 1996

Reporting on an international conference with over one hundred panels (most of which have four speakers) is a bit like starting a new research project: you approach the task with a heightened awareness of your criteria for selection and you are immediately faced with the impossibility of 'representativeness' (whether you aspire to it or not). Should you gesture towards objectivity (and fairness?) and attend a cross-section of subjects, or should you simply follow your own interests and make your partialities explicit?

Attending my first SCS Conference I could not avoid an internal running commentary of national comparison, especially having been involved in organizing *Screen Studies* Conferences in Britain during the past few years. The shock of the wealth and abundance of the US academic scene for the British writer may be a cliché, but it remains a most striking contrast both in terms of style and presentation, and in terms of venue and accommodation. Hosted by the University of North Texas and located in the Sheraton Park Central Hotel, North Dallas, the SCS 1996 Conference, 'Visual Cultures in the 1990s', provided a luxurious context for academic debate rarely experienced elsewhere, at least in Britain. Resources did not seem to be in short supply: an impressive number of screenings and discussions with filmmakers, for example, ran parallel to the panels throughout the programme. Dress sense, however, if a little smarter in North America, seems to unite film and television scholars everywhere: black is still in.

One of the most striking features of the conference for me was not just the number of panels concerned with gender and sexuality (feminism is still very much on the agenda), but the impact of 'queer theory' on cinema

studies in the 1990s. Still in dialogue with lesbian and gay work in the field (there were panels on 'Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals in the Future' and 'Gay and Lesbian Reception and Representation'), the move to 'queer' seems to have markedly invigorated and extended the debate: there were panels on 'Queer Transcendence' and 'Queer Theory and the Question of Method', as well as numerous others that took queer theory as their starting point. Most evident in work on Hollywood stars (notably in the papers of Michael DeAngelis and Steven Cohen) but also informing work on genre (papers by John Champagne and Amy Villarejo), fandom (Matthew Tinkcom) and reading strategies (Joseba Gabilondo and Jane Hender), as well as specific films (Alexandra Juhasz introduced the new African-American docunarrative *The Watermelon Woman*), the queer lens is in some ways taken as the guarantor of a sustained political edge to cinema studies; it both celebrates the diversity of visual cultures in the 1990s and explores the intersections of marginal positionalities.

If the SCS conference can be viewed as indicative of broader trends within film studies, then 'queer' has acquired the pervasive currency of a highly flexible sign: it offers itself as an interpretative theory of postmodern pastiche, drag and parody in popular cinema; it connects film theory to grass-roots film and video activism, especially around HIV and AIDS issues; and it contributes to theories of the flexible and fluid subjects of media text and spectators. In the face of the decline of certain strands of Marxist criticism, queer theory is deployed in part to cover that absence and yet to continue the struggle (if of a different kind). My worry about the protean character of the queer sign, however, despite my own excitement about some of its possibilities, is the coincidence of theories of *performativity* with those of *screen performance*. *Performativity* ('doing things with words' in a way that J. L. Austin would never have contemplated) has been widely

taken up across the disciplines to invoke a notion of the repeated invention of the sexual subject through conventionalized 'speech acts'. At this conference, as elsewhere, there was rather too much evidence of the straightforward adaptation of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Judith Butler's theories of 'queer performativity' to readings of the performance of gender and sexuality on the cinema screen. To conflate performativity with screen performance is in some ways to lose the specificity of each. Several papers on Hollywood cinema used Butler's work to argue that gender, sexuality (and indeed the cinematic image itself) are performed on screen in such a way that draws attention to their own conventionality, their lack of originary signification and thus their lack of authenticity to pleasingly denaturalizing effect.

In this move from cultural constructionism to queer performativity, postmodern reflexivity, shifting cinematic sign values and political motivation are rather too swiftly condensed. In attributing to Hollywood cinema a deconstructive self-parody (Bette Davis and Joan Crawford perform femininity, Mel Gibson and Keanu Reeves perform masculinity, *Forrest Gump* performs history, Tarantino's films perform cinematic conventions) we may be mistakenly attributing to Hollywood our own critical desires and assuming too much about who is busy 'untying the text'. If mainstream cinema can be read as endlessly denaturalizing its own conventions through the lens of performativity, it has miraculously taken over the job of the critical scholars who need no longer concern themselves with its conservative tendencies. This is not to say that there is not some very valuable work being done in this area. Of course the study of stardom lends itself perfectly to camp readings and to the deployment of theories of performance and parody to deconstruct naturalizations of gender and sexuality, this is no doubt why there has been a highly productive dialogue between star studies and lesbian and gay criticism in

the past. However, the challenge remains, I think, to do this in such a way as to open up a debate about theories of queer performativity and their relationship to screen performances, rather than simply to assume the deconstructive effects of the one through the other.

What is partly at stake here, of course, is history (or its absence). How self-conscious should we be about our own critical 1990s reading practices, which so easily see past texts as parodies, given that the styles and conventions of performance have changed so dramatically? Read within their own historical locations, or by particular audiences at particular times, these images of gender and sexuality might seem less parodic (indeed the otherwise stimulating panel on 'Star Texts in the 1950s' might have benefited from further discussion of just these issues). Questions of historical methodology were, however, the subject of a very different workshop, on 'Historiographies and National Cinema Cultures', in which Annette Kuhn, Mary Beth Haralovich and Jill Matthews discussed research in progress on British, American and Australian cinema cultures in the 1920s and 1930s. Kuhn reported on her own recently funded 'ethnohistory' which uses audiences' memories (amongst other sources) to investigate representations of cinema-going as a cultural practice of everyday life in 1930s Britain. Challenging the model of Americanization as imperialism in the Australian context at this time, Matthews suggested instead the need to look at the role of film in the constitution of modern Australia in which Hollywood cinema was Australian popular culture. Haralovich looked at the local and national press reception of Hollywood films in the Depression and suggested that Hollywood cinema was read as an imported culture even within the USA. All three papers, and the animated discussion that followed the presentations, indicated both the complex variations and tensions within the local, national and international cinema cultures of

modernity, and the enormous scope for further work on audiences, reception and consumption within cinema studies in the future.

Questions of nationhood, ethnicity and gender were further debated in a panel entitled 'Reproducing the Made-for-TV Nation' in which the increasing breakdown of divisions between representation and everyday life was once again brought to the fore. 'Lifetime TV', 'TV movies', 'docudramas' and 'miniseries' were scrutinized for the ways in which television genres participate in the reproduction of regional, national and global cultures. Joy Fuqua, for example, analysed the role of Texas in the constitution of national narrative through a discussion of the docudrama of the 'Texan cheer-leading murdering Mom', Wanda Holloway; and Chantal Nadeau investigated the TV miniseries *Million Dollar Babies* as a Canadian national family-rama which told of the battle between parents, government and media in the case of the famous quintuplets. In both cases, distinctions between fact and fiction blur: the role of the media is shown to be central to the construction of these 'life events', and the televisation of these 'real life' domestic dramas in turn demonstrates the generic overlaps between the two in the constitution of the nation state through feminine forms of cultural production and consumption.

The inclusion of research on media other than the cinema within SCS has clearly been an ongoing historical battle: how can the cinema be held apart from television and video, or advertising and consumer culture, in an age of such prolific intertextuality and interfaced technologies? Indeed, the title of this year's conference, 'Visual Cultures in the 1990s', (despite the continued use of the professional title 'Cinema Studies') clearly welcomed a broadening of scope, and several panels reflected this. In a panel on 'Metaphors of Movement', Anne Friedberg's 'The virtual window: screening the future', Scott Bukatman's 'The ultimate trip' and Ellen Strain's 'Post-touristic authenticity and

simulacra' Michael Crichton as travel writer of the nineties' all investigated the changing technological claims to truth, authenticity and the real. The escalating movement of shifting gazes across interchangeable frames, screens and windows was taken to show the transformation of conventionally cinematic relations of spectacles and spectators. The literal and virtual speeding up of mobility, it was argued, has been accompanied by a hypervisuality that confounds previous distinctions across technologies. Perhaps, it was suggested, if seeing is no longer believing, and visual pleasure in postmodern cinema is located in the pliability not the fixity of the image, then authenticity is traded for the intensity of the visual effect. The return to the past in films such as *Jurassic Park*, Strain suggested, show the diegetic tourist caught in this tension and finding simulation to be the new guarantor of authenticity.

In a rather different vein, but with a similar emphasis on questions of movement and the changing relations of space and time in contemporary culture, Eve Oishi's 'Close encounters: exiles, aliens and tourists' offered an analysis of recent 'queer' video work by K. Brent Hill, Kathy High and Shani Mootoo, and Raul Ferrera-Balanquet. Drawing on Paul Gilroy's work on the double consciousness of black atlantic identities and Homi Bhabha's notion of living in the beyond, Oishi provided a refreshingly nuanced take on the debates about globalization, reading these new interventions through the tension between globalizing cultures and restricted mobilities. Identities, she suggested, are produced in the movement across and beyond borders and boundaries. She further emphasized the centrality of desire to travel narrative, and transcendent journeys across boundaries of nation and geographical location 'Is diasporic desire different?', she asked, and proceeded to read the video work through an innovative dialogue between global discourses and queer theory.

Video culture was also the focus for a panel

entitled 'Theorizing the "Ontology" of the Video Image', with papers by Eric Freedman, Laura Marks, Michael Renov and James Moran which addressed the changing specificities of video technology in relation to questions of virtual communities, identities and subjectivities. Eric Freedman presented a case study of "Childshield USA" which offers parents a service through which to film and secretly store videos of their children in case of their future abduction. This practice, together with the placing of photographs of missing children on the side of milk cartons next to advertisements for local carpet cleaning services, were read as indications of the promised reassurances offered by forms of visual surveillance in response to a perception of increased risk in our culture. These 'disciplinary methods' of photography and video were seen to be part of the heightened anxieties around public and familial safety, and to display the desire for security in the guarantee of visual evidence at a time of crisis in family and nation.

The status of visual evidence in a culture that is both obsessed with truth claims and yet ever more aware of their provisionality was a theme that, not surprisingly in these postmodern times, ran throughout the conference. It was one with particular resonance for a conference in the city of Dallas, whose most alluring tourist attraction for many conference participants was the 'Sixth Floor, John F. Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation', a museum which offers wide-ranging documentation about the life, assassination and legacy of President Kennedy. Not only is the museum housed on the site 'where the fatal shot was fired', and visitors can look out of the window onto an imagined/remembered scene below, but the historical material that continues to fuel debate about the assassination thirty years later is primarily visual: photographs, documentary film and home-movie footage. A visit to the museum left a lingering sense of a traumatized nation whose response to this unimaginable

event has been the pursuit of a desire for absolute truth through visual evidence, and yet the museum simultaneously displayed the impossibility of such a quest and demonstrated perfectly the crisis of representation so much under discussion at a conference on visual cultures in the 1990s.

Jackie Stacey

Console-ing Passions Conference, Madison, 25-28 April 1996

The fifth annual Console-ing Passions conference was held in the centre of Madison, Wisconsin, at the chilly end of April 1996. This well-established, welcoming and exhilarating event now has a secure place on the scholarly and social calendar of the USA and, to a lesser extent, the UK. There were fewer UK participants than in previous years, but many more, I know, were aware of it and would like to have been there. There seemed to be more men than before, though it remained an unequivocally woman-dominated occasion, perhaps one reason for the relaxed and friendly atmosphere pervading both panels and the all-important gatherings of old friends, familiar faces and new contacts. The many excellent graduate students from the USA included overseas students, several from the Indian sub-continent, making it a more international conference than the list of participating universities might suggest.

Unlike Ann Gray, reporting in *Screen* (vol 36, no. 4) on last year's conference in Seattle, I heard remarkably few over-length or garbled papers. Did this year's participants perhaps take heed of her wise advice that 'we need to learn to speak and listen to each other'? Nevertheless, although the panels at one-and-three-quarter hours allowed adequate time for both papers and discussion, the three-paper panels were more satisfactory than those with four. Perhaps this was because of the greater likelihood of shared, or at least

entitled 'Theorizing the "Ontology" of the Video Image', with papers by Eric Freedman, Laura Marks, Michael Renov and James Moran which addressed the changing specificities of video technology in relation to questions of virtual communities, identities and subjectivities. Eric Freedman presented a case study of "Childshield USA" which offers parents a service through which to film and secretly store videos of their children in case of their future abduction. This practice, together with the placing of photographs of missing children on the side of milk cartons next to advertisements for local carpet cleaning services, were read as indications of the promised reassurances offered by forms of visual surveillance in response to a perception of increased risk in our culture. These 'disciplinary methods' of photography and video were seen to be part of the heightened anxieties around public and familial safety, and to display the desire for security in the guarantee of visual evidence at a time of crisis in family and nation.

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overlapping, concerns in the papers, probably it was more often down to the concentration span of the audience. Breaks between sessions, often only fifteen minutes, were too short, inhibiting the pursuit of issues generated in the discussion following papers, not to mention catching up on what had gone on in other panels. The conference offered a rich diet: the videotape, for example, ran concurrently with paper sessions for two of the conference's four days. Drawing on the celebrated archives at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, its programme alone would have kept this participant happy with a series of two-hour programmes of television material from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – the earliest example being a 1952 pilot *Mr Peepers*. I don't know the answer to this problem of *embarras de richesse*. Does it lie in a more rigorous selection of papers? I heard few that were either disappointing or inappropriate. Perhaps a longer period is required? Four days is already substantial and although this certainly is a stimulating event I doubt whether participants would stay the course for longer.

All this raises the important question, asked by Ann Gray in her report on last year's Seattle conference and again by Richard Dyer apropos the 1995 *Screen Studies* conference (*Screen*, vol 37, no. 2), of what we may or should expect from a scholarly conference. On the evidence of Gray's and Dyer's reports and my own experience, I can say that one lure is the prospect of convivial and uninterrupted engagement (uninterrupted at least by routine domestic and professional commitments) with colleagues and friends – and this, of course, is in itself both valuable and refreshing. But is it enough? Can we also expect to feel our fingers on the pulse, as it were, of the body of thought with which we have chosen to engage? Furthermore, is it too much to want the ordered juxtaposition of different scholarly efforts to generate speculation which tests, measures and, at best, exceeds the limits of individual papers? In this way, after all, new

questions are provoked. Perhaps the disquiet evident in Gray's and Dyer's reports marks a disappointed desire displaced onto a critique of delivery, organization, focus? To achieve the speculative excitement we might wish for, however, suggests a generous risk-taking on the part of organizers, paper-givers and participants which is bound, more often than not, to seem messy and to fail – but the possibility of failure should not prohibit the attempt. It is true, however, that the structure of the conference is crucial in facilitating debate central among the many dilemmas facing the organizers (1996 Programme Committee: Jane Feuer, Julie D'Acci, Ellen Seiter, Mary Beth Haralovich) is the particularly thorny problem of when, where or, indeed, whether to programme plenary sessions which all participants may attend together and in which conference concerns may be signalled, considered or summarized. The 1996 Madison programme eschewed the conventional opening and closing plenaries, choosing instead to situate the ritual welcomes and thanks in social events and placing the main plenary in the middle of the first full day.

The plenary's theme echoed that of the conference as a whole – 'Fighting Backlashes Global and Local Perspectives'. The backlash in question was the perceived threat to higher education and to academic autonomy in the USA, this was a strictly local, if not parochial, perspective. Successive speakers (Julie D'Acci, Lauren Rabinowitz, Phebe Chao, Regina Festa, Mary Beth Haralovich, Vicky Mayer and Sandy Stone) outlined their recent experience and suggested strategies for resistance. The plenary resembled nothing so much as a union meeting (unknown, it seems, to US academics) in which anxieties and grievances could be aired and shared, its relation to the conference as a whole was both tangential, in the sense that the matters at issue specifically concerned the politics of higher education in the USA, and central, in the sense that the future of the scholarship

presented in conference papers may depend on our successful resistance to perceived threats. In this area the politics of race, class and gender, not to mention those of capital and labour, which informed many papers and panel discussions, were subsumed into the immediate practicalities of the politics of education confronting academics. It is worth noting that though all the experiences recounted concerned the US context, the problems are certainly familiar to academics in the UK. The only other 'plenary' session, billed for later the same day as a 'related event', was the University of Wisconsin-Madison's annual Gladys Borcher Lecture, given this year by George Lipsitz. Perhaps fortuitously his lecture responded directly to the anxieties about corporatization, faculty, department and programme closures and loss of tenure expressed in the earlier plenary. Lipsitz took global, transnational economies and their relation to popular culture (understood in its widest sense) as his subject in a sometimes thrilling demonstration of their interdependence. Michael Jordan's endorsement fee for the Air Jordans so prized by inner-city youth all over the globe, he informed us, exceeded the wages of all the Indonesian women in the six factories manufacturing the shoes. In what I took to be an upbeat closure, he reminded his audience that cultural movements which are not hooked to place, such as those concerned with issues of gender and of the environment, can be as mobile as international capital. In this way, his roving discourse proposed a strategic link between the many case studies of television productions, representations, and readership practices, which were presented in panel sessions, and the apparently parochial concerns of the central plenary.

The forty-four panels organized into thirteen sessions focused on television history, global or transnational issues, new technologies (the internet and the world wide web), and the largest number (fifteen) on issues of representations and readings of, and by,

so-called 'minority' groups. The latter has been the impetus and staple of the conference since its inception, and it was in these panels that questions of gender, race and class were addressed. The colossal scale of the conference's remit, combined with the number of papers programmed (147 excluding video presentations), certainly risked degeneration into the 'pick 'n' mix' signalled by Gray (p. 419), but it was nevertheless possible to choose a coherent path through the variety of clustered concerns which were clearly, and on the whole accurately, indicated in the titles of panels. Excellent and imaginative programming by Jane Feuer ensured internal coherence in most panels where often the sum of the discussion did exceed the parts of the papers.

A three-paper panel 'Global TV', for example, generated discussion which was clearly productive, both for its three graduate student speakers and for its (sadly rather small) audience, on the question of national identity and its imbrication in production and reception processes. Shanti Kumar (Indiana), in a close analysis of a 'transgressive moment' in a Bombay talk show *Nikki Tonight*, showed how national identity is produced in the moment that it is transgressed. Sheri Beisen (Texas) detailed the consequences for the local Hawaiian economy of the long running (1968-1980) *Hawaii 5-0*, and Sudeep Dasgupta (Pittsburgh), in a theoretically sophisticated presentation, explored the ideology of 'development' in the context of global television and national culture. In these diverse papers there was a sense of careful questions, prompted by personal experience, about the local consequences of global television. This term was, quite properly, rendered complex by enquiries which referred to the transnational movement of capital, to cultural imperialism and US export practices, and to the effects all these have in such diverse areas as television genre, local employment opportunities and the day to day notions of identity informing the experience of individual subjects. Since all

three speakers kept to time, there was a full half-hour's discussion in which unforeseen connections between the three papers and their wider implications could be explored; despite – more probably because of – the intrinsic interest of each of the papers, this was the most absorbing part of this panel.

In a different vein, one of the three panels devoted to the 1950s, again through the juxtapositioning of three carefully researched and well-presented case studies, provoked stimulating discussion about the regulatory effects of developing television production technology and form. Kristen Hatch (UCLA), drawing on Foucault's ideas about the panopticon, presented work on the US soap's transition from radio to television showing how the female body, in its presentation in both television advertisements and soaps, was subject to regulation. L. Clare Bratten (Wisconsin–Madison) showed how the conjunction of early technology with Dinah Shore's particular talents allowed her success on US television, and Madelyn Ritrosky-Winslow (Indiana), in a case study of the *Loretta Young Show*, suggested that the rapid expansion of television in the early 1950s allowed opportunities to often ageing female stars (Loretta Young and Lucille Ball were both forty at the start of their television careers) which had never been available to them in Hollywood.

Generally tentative pronouncements about television audiences suggested a widespread awareness of the methodological problems besetting this crucial aspect of research into both historical and contemporary television. This awareness, to be welcomed for the sophistication it demands, perhaps accounts for the many papers concentrating on discrete issues, such as Lisa Flores's (Arizona) reception study of Chicana readings of contemporary US mainstream programming, Roseann Mandzuik's (Southwest Texas) analysis of a contemporary Russian women's talk show *Ya Cama*, or Steven Classen's (California San Bernadino) study of black

Mississippians' memories of television in the 1960s. 'Turn on Channel 3, there's a black person on TV'. These may sound like a series of unrelated and fragmentary approaches to the global media, but speakers were largely successful in connecting their material to broader conceptual questions – hence the juxtaposition of discrete studies was invariably productive and stimulating. Lipsitz's insistence on attention to the small-scale, local consequences of global manoeuvres had thus been anticipated in many of the papers, and there was, too, an implicit understanding of what Lorraine Code in her book *Epistemic Responsibility* (University Press of New England, 1987) has characterized as a feminist contribution to epistemology, that is to say an acknowledgement of the responsibility inherent in 'knowing'. Here, perhaps, is where the 'feminism' of the conference's title 'Television, Video and Feminism' comes in

The guarded attention to the question of audience and readership practices which marked so many papers produced a certain consensus whereby the television text was acknowledged to be marginal to the meanings produced by readers with such pronounced geographical, cultural and, in the case of studies of early television, historical diversity. In the memories of Mississippi blacks, in the uses made by contemporary Chicana women of their viewing, among the Bombay audience for *Nikki Tonight*, the text, it seems, acted as a kind of trigger for readings certainly unforeseen by its producers. Martin Allor (Concordia) deployed the concept of 'orality' in his discussion of television in Quebec, suggesting that the circulation of meanings between performers, genres and local issues results in the *talk* accompanying the text – its orality – having a greater impact on the production of culture than any single text itself can do. Perhaps it is a general understanding of this point that accounts for the dominance of case studies which, at best, were carefully specific about their scope and circumspect in their claims for general significance.

Political awareness at Console-ing Passions may be based on a feminist consciousness, but the impression gained from panels attended by this participant was that it is now focused on national and transnational structures within which a variety of struggles – loosely but not very satisfactorily linked by the ubiquitous term 'identity' – are understood to be taking place. This preoccupation amongst a noticeable minority of conference papers was already in evidence in March 1994 at Tucson, Arizona, but it is now much more overt. Does this suggest, perhaps, a trend in feminist television scholarship which, understanding the concept of responsibility inherent in knowing, points to the consequences outside the academy of textual studies conducted within it? Is this, perhaps, what we might expect of an international forum focusing, as this one does, on global communication forms? I await with interest next year's conference, to be locally organized by Chantal Nadeau and Martin Allor, in Montréal at the beginning of May 1997.

Janet Thumim

The 18th Crétel International Festival of Women's Films, 22–31 March 1996

As it approaches the end of its teenage years, Crétel seems caught between the adolescent angst of being misunderstood and the more attractive prospect of coming of age. Thus while preview articles (in *Le Monde*) situate the festival within the context of the recent success of several French women directors – 'French directors have escaped from the margins and conquered the public' – those same directors (including Danièle Dubroux and Josiane Balasko) steered well clear of Crétel. Equally, other articles suggested that the festival has left behind its origins in the women's movement and the militant 1970s, yet it could be argued that 1996 saw an

increased attention to what one might call 'women's issues'.

A major development to the usual festival format – and one sign of its coming of age – was the careful designation of spaces for discussion. This took several different forms, from the minor adjustments of the daily information sheet, which now included summarized discussions of the previous day, to the more major forums and conference programmes on numerous topics. Examples included a forum on 'Femmes, Images et Médias' which discussed the recent conference in Peking, analysing how it was reported on in the news, and inviting women journalists to focus on their role in the media. For those who attended, this section seemed to be a welcome addition to the daily screenings, suggesting a recognition of the unique (one might even say privileged) space Crétel offers for gatherings such as this.

As well as the ten fiction, twelve documentary and thirty short films in competition, there were several special sections. The first was the usual *Graine de Cinéphage*, in which a group of local school children chose their favourite film from a special selection. This year the jury consisted of equal numbers of French and Latin American children, the latter participating in an exchange between Crétel and Havana. The largest special section, in which there were twenty-seven films and seventeen videos, focused on women in Indian cinema and was foregrounded by this year's poster featuring a sari-clad woman curiously standing in a swimming pool. However the films on offer here shunned this rather ethereal image to instead tell tales of strict tradition: a young woman past the marrying age is married to a tree in *Sati* (Aparna Sen, 1989); caste prejudice in *Rudali/The Mourner* (Kalpana Lajmi, 1992); or the conflict between village roots and the modern city in *Disha/The Emigrés* (Sai Paranjpye, 1990). Equally, many if not most of the videos dealt with controversial subjects. The achievement of

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these film- and videomakers is only fully evident once one considers the almost total male dominance of Indian cinema, and the fact that the few women who do direct are typically forced to ape the masculine models.

The intersection of the sexual with the national and familial, evident in the Indian section, also arose as an issue in one of the fiction films in competition *Vacant Possession* (Margot Nash, Australia, 1994) is a film in which Australia's past as colonized and colonizer is played out across the landscape of a female body. The central character, Tessa, is back home at Botany Bay, after years of self-imposed exile, to weep for her mother and to sort out her inheritance with her sister. It is the self-contained body of Tessa which hovers at the centre of this film, and her family and national politics surface as moments of abjection in her journey to selfhood. In this corporeal narrative, the mercury pollution of Botany Bay, an emblem of British imperialism, becomes vomit, while Tessa's bloody leg, foreshadowing a forthcoming abortion, marks the disruptive space of her alcoholic father in his attempt to keep the white bloodline pure. A mixture of *The Piano* (Jane Campion, New Zealand, 1994) with a different kind of magic, and *Once were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, New Zealand, 1994) with a different kind of family, *Vacant Possession* willingly acknowledges, then successfully goes beyond, its influences.

Among the other fiction films in competition were two, equally thought-provoking, though decidedly more playful, 'historical (melo) dramas': *Carlota Joaquina, Princesa do Brazil/Carlota Joaquina, Princess of Brazil* (Carla Camurati, Brazil, 1995) and *Marie-Antoinette is niet dood/Marie-Antoinette is not dead* (Irma Achten, Netherlands/Belgium, 1995). In the first, Carla Camurati creates a circus of baroque images through which the gross heroine charts her dark and passion-led journeys. Carlota Joaquina's life story leads us from a Catholic court with old hags dancing

the tango and mothers with pearls instead of teeth, to Protestant Portugal, full of devout priests, stale bread and mad queens. This grotesque version of history moves on to Brazil, a jungle of colours and dance, passions and animals. To *Carlota Joaquina's* syncopated tone *Marie-Antoinette is niet dood* seemed to offer an operatic accompaniment. Although this film was based upon a real person, its interest was not in historical fact, but rather in the resonances with a contemporary royal story. Thus, according to the film, Marie Antoinette was not only 'not dead', she was in fact someone with multiple personalities who closely resembled Princess Di. These two films, and others such as Sally Potter's *Orlando* (UK/Rus./Fr./It./Neth., 1992) and the aforementioned *The Piano*, suggest that the treatment of history by women directors has shifted from its former 'telling the untold stories' to a more distanced stance in which style dominates story.

The shift described above suggests an increasing disillusion with forms of 'realism'. However, the real was momentarily brought back into focus at Créteil through the documentary section. *Before you Go* (Nicole Betancourt, US, 1995), and *Wiz* (Agnès Poirier, France, 1995), winner of the documentary prize, are comparable in their focus on two men imprisoned in some way. Whereas in the first this is the filmmaker's father dying of AIDS, in the second it is 'Wiz', a crack dealer in the USA about to be released from jail. Curiously enough, despite the difference in the relation between filmmaker and subject, Poirier gets far closer to her subject than Betancourt, whose obsessiveness tends to obscure the family ties which she is hoping to revive for her father's last few months. Meanwhile the public's choice for the documentary prize was Greta Schiller's *Paris was a Woman* (UK/US/Germany, 1995). Given the common ground this film shares with past documentary winners (uncovering absented women, a lesbian theme, one of the most entertaining documentaries) it

might be suggested that the public's vote is becoming rather predictable

The Latin-American theme initiated with *Graine de Cinéphage* was much in evidence elsewhere as this year's autoportrait was given to Maria Félix. Félix is perhaps best remembered in France for her role in Jean Renoir's *French Cancan* (France, 1954). As well as this film, the programme showed six others including three of her Mexican films, *Dona Barbara* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1946), *Enamorada* (1946) and *Maclovia* (1948), both by Emilio Fernández. Even this small selection revealed the very specific connotations of Félix's star persona, and the ambiguous nature of her characters seems written on her face through a beauty spot which she is condemned, for publicity purposes, to hide with insistent profile poses

Although she may have been one of the most interesting intercontinental film stars, Félix was, of course, not the only one, and we are reminded of this fact by the documentary *Carmen Miranda, Bananas 'is' my Business* (Helena Solberg, US, 1994). Picking up again on the Latin-American flavour running through the festival, the story of Carmen Miranda is investigated while incorporating a personal focus, as an unnamed Brazilian woman (possibly the director) remembers a grand funeral in the streets of Brazil. The story of Carmen Miranda, the Portuguese-born singer designated the symbol of Brazilian culture on US screens (both cinema and television), although comparable to that of Maria Félix, is indicative of the differences between Hollywood and other cinemas. Despite the evident seriousness of Maria Félix and frivolity of the all-singing all-dancing Miranda, in comparison to Miranda's adornment in extravagant costumes and designation as the symbol of Brazilian culture in the USA, the use of Félix's otherness by European directors seems relatively subtle and complex.

Historical puzzles, questions of speaking, and the subversion of the politics of

representation are the themes of one of the most innovative films on show in Créteil this year *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, US, 1995). This film is Dunye's first feature and follows her short film, *Greetings from Africa* (1994), shown at Créteil last year. Like *Greetings from Africa*, *The Watermelon Woman* takes the form of a personal meditation from Dunye – star of both films – upon life in Philadelphia as a black lesbian who dates white women. However, where her short film essentially stays with this topic, her feature embroiders the picture with a double plot in which Cheryl undertakes research for a film about the (fictional) 'watermelon woman', a black actress from the 1940s.

The low-budget and frequently down-graded look of this film was in stark contrast to its content. The mixing of Cheryl's personal (love) life – her involvement with Diana (played by Guinevere Turner of *Go Fish* [Rose Troche, 1994] fame – with her time at work in a video shop (a *Clerks* [Kevin Smith, 1994] for chicks) and the fascinating fabrication of the watermelon woman (who is gradually revealed as a lesbian who dated white directors) produces a new genre, the 'auto-sexual-racial-cine-poem'. *The Watermelon Woman* is very conscious about its referents, and in its use of Guinevere Turner and several intertextual references to *Go Fish* the film would seem to want to invite the audience which made the former such a hit (on the strength of the one and a half hour enthusiastic discussion after this screening with Cheryl Dunye it seems to have succeeded)

However, in its complex layering, *The Watermelon Woman* actually has more in common with Yvonne Rainer's *Privilege* (US, 1994) or *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, US, 1991). The bracketing of these three films together is meant to indicate a school of filmmaking which is 'post-feminist' in the sense that it is fully aware of where it is coming from, and is intent upon filling the gaps identified by its 1970s predecessors. Such

cinema should be distinguished from the 'post-feminism' of many French women filmmakers whose 'escape from the margins and conquering of the public' boasted of earlier is dependent upon the severing of any connection with past (and passe) feminism. As we have discussed in previous years, the festival seems unsure as to which of these positions it prefers. However the public were not so indecisive, and awarded *The Watermelon Woman* this year's fiction prize.

In terms of the other competition prizes, comedy/tragedy seemed the dominant appeal. Thus the jury prize for best feature went to *Xiatian de Xue/Summer Snow* (Ann Hui, Hong Kong, 1994). This film offered a touching look at how one family copes with the father's Alzheimer's disease. Given the general critical vogue for Chinese and Hong Kong cinema one would hope that this film might be given an international release, however the fact that it bridges the art cinema/popular division and that it is already two years old suggests that this will not be the case.

Although the programme of short films was this year longer than ever, there were few that were memorable. One of the exceptions was *The Home for Blind Women* (Sandra Kybarats, Canada, 1995). At first this film seems to be another example of the recovering of forgotten

histories, as a male interviewer interrogates two old women about the 'home for blind women' where they lived in the late 1920s, yet there is an unexpected twist. Stylistically the film combines a Wellesian melange of grainy snapshots and real-time interviews, which suggest a 'true' story, with quirky and unreliable characters pointing more towards fiction. The publicity for the film asks: 'a truthful document or comic fiction? or, how does one make truth out of what is false?', and it is the mingling of these two extremes which lingers.

The main appeal of this film is that the filmmaker is not interested in separating the truth from the fabrication; consequently what emerges through this elaborate set piece is a sense of the fragility of all oral histories. It seems appropriate to extend this observation to Créteil itself, for once again the oral historian for the festival, the organizer Jackie Buet, spent much time defending, discussing, avoiding and denying many of the questions which her programming threw up. Given the quality of the films on show this year one is tempted to tell her that in fact the festival manages very adequately to speak for itself.

Cathy Fowler and Petra Kuppers

reviews

review:

Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 248 pp.

Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* London: Routledge, 1995, 238 pp.

LOLA YOUNG

Reading culture

First, an obligatory note about using the term 'black'. There cannot be many academics currently working in Cultural Studies who feel able to use this term unproblematically. The debates about the lack of fixity or racial naming and categorization; the postmodern identification and analyses of the politics of cultural identities; the characteristic fluidity of the primacy of a given set of identifications: all of these points mean that there can be no simple gathering together under the banner of 'blackness' without a consideration of the underlying political disadvantages and benefits which this entails. Even Bobo, who does the least to interrogate the term, feels obliged to refute anticipated charges of racial and gender essentialism (p. 24).

The reason for starting with this brief entry on the constitution of 'black' is in order to suggest that approaches to such questions are inflected in the research findings and the choice of methodologies. This review will focus on some of the methodological issues and concerns of Bobo's and Gillespie's books, and in particular the positioning of the two authors as researchers of specific communities; these seem to me to lie at the centre of any critique of these texts.

Although both Bobo and Gillespie take the reader or viewer as the focus of the research, each does this in a different way. Bobo's work

is characterized by her insistence on the specificity of black women as an interpretative community, and this is coupled with her concern to relate the views and observations of her respondents to her own readings of a number of books and films. Gillespie, on the other hand, takes as her starting point the young people whose community she is studying, and does not attempt to give close readings of the various texts cited by her respondents. More rigorous methodologically, Gillespie's piece is less interesting in regard to the analysis of her research findings than Bobo's, for reasons which I hope to elucidate. The main issue raised by both texts in terms of their methodology is their account – or, with Bobo, lack of an account – of how the researcher is situated in the research and inserted into the final text.

At first glance, it may seem that there is little to link these two books for the purpose of critical analysis. Bobo's research concerns only a small group of African-American women and she works through with them their responses to *The Colour Purple* (Alice Walker's novel [1985] and Stephen Spielberg's film [1985]), *Waiting to Exhale* (Terry McMillan's bestselling novel [1992]) and Julie Dash's film, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). She intermingles their responses with her own readings of the texts, and argues that black women constitute an interpretative community that often has to perform a series of complex negotiations with those popular texts constructed by white people in order to derive some pleasure from them. In examining how these women react to Walker's and MacMillan's novels and Dash's film, Bobo concludes that textual negotiations are less protracted and less enervating when reading texts produced by black women. It is apparent throughout that Bobo is a part of the group she studies inasmuch as, like them, she is a well-educated, independent black woman and this appears to facilitate her dialogues with the groups' members.

In contrast, Gillespie concentrates on a small group of 'young Punjabi Londoners' based in Southall (on the western edges of London, not far from Heathrow airport). Gillespie's findings are based on an ethnographic study which she undertook after having taught in schools in the area for ten years, and on a larger questionnaire-based piece of research of a sample of just over three hundred: with this group, *Neighbours* is the most popular text. Gillespie identifies herself as an Irish Catholic, older than the young people she studies, and thus not able to claim an immediate, unproblematised familiarity with the group.

A significant point of comparison between Bobo and Gillespie though, is that of the emphasis placed on the racial or ethnic identity of the researcher, and the implications for reading the responses of the group under discussion. Bobo does not feel the need to problematize the idea of 'blackness', for her it is a fact. Gillespie, however, works through the difficult notion of a stable racial or ethnic identity in some detail. They also hold in common the basic premiss that black readers/

audiences may be readily distinguished from white ones in their studies: neither could start without such an assumption being in place.

Constructing communities

Bobo's essay on black women's responses to the film of *The Colour Purple* has been available for some time now, and already established some authority for the study before the publication of the book.¹ In that essay, Bobo's stated aim was to 'examine the way in which a specific audience creates meaning from a mainstream text and uses the reconstructed meaning to empower themselves and their social group'.² Both the earlier essay and the recent book are informed by an assumption that the categories 'sex' and 'race' constitute sufficiently specific and bounded categories as to be united to the exclusion of other socially constructed aspects of subjectivity. Bobo stated that her analysis would demonstrate the extent to which black women cultural consumers are connected to the recent publishing successes of African-American women writers. Although not articulated in quite the same terms, these two objectives clearly underpin her research as elaborated in *Black Women as Cultural Readers*.

There is a variety of interpretations available to black women reading the texts on which Bobo draws, but the positions taken in regard to the texts are largely structured by the black women's experiences of, and responses to, the way in which they have been rendered as mute objects, or as a troubling presence, or a complete absence historically through representation. Bobo argues that the negotiations and reconstructions of the popular texts undertaken by her respondents are necessarily empowering, and that these new meanings are qualitatively different from those of black men. For Bobo, the category 'black women' indicates a singular set of characteristics, and is distinct from 'black men', and from white women and men. This notion of empowerment draws on John Fiske whom she cites in her introduction as having relevance for black women's engagement with *The Colour Purple*, and she assimilates into her work some of the problems associated with Fiske's celebratory accounts of the popular appropriation of popular texts (p. 50).

Bobo does not enter into debates about subjectivity as fashioned by postmodern considerations of cultural and racial identity. Clearly more secure than Gillespie (and less questioning) about her own position in relation to her respondents, Bobo is concerned to give a voice to those who are not normally consulted about their opinions. The much quoted axiom that 'all the women are white and all the blacks are men' is sadly still the case. Her eagerness to give legitimacy to these readings prevents a more detailed engagement with the premisses of her investigation.

To take one area of concern: in her analysis of *The Colour Purple*

1 Jacqueline Bobo *The Colour Purple* black women as cultural readers in Deidre Pribram (ed.) *Female Spectators Looking at Film and Television* (London: Verso 1988)

2 *Ibid.* p. 93

Bobo is highly critical of the film's treatment of 'race' and racism, the representation of the brutality of black men and the changes made to the relationship and characters of Shug and Celie. She argues that with *The Colour Purple*, black women have to work hard to retrieve positive value from the text. Initially Bobo refers to Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust* in the context of her discussion of Fiske and the popular, and her introductory remarks about *The Colour Purple* referred to above. In what sense might *Daughters of the Dust* be considered as a popular text analogous to *The Colour Purple* or *Waiting to Exhale*? Just how does Dash's film confer power on the African-American women who watch it? *Daughters of the Dust* is the subject of a celebratory appraisal, not a critical one. There is little to suggest how problematic many women have found this film, little sense that black women are riven by economic and social inequalities as much as other 'communities' and that this may also inflect their readings of cultural forms. Bobo claims that for *Daughters of the Dust*, 'black women's interpretive abilities were not as strained' (p. 5). This is important because with this predisposition towards Dash's film and the antagonism towards Spielberg's, the question arises as to how these texts were presented to the respondents as objects of study.

The narrow social base of her respondents is another important issue. Bobo states that,

There were some remarkable similarities between the women in McMillan's novel [*Waiting to Exhale*] and the women in my research group that I did not attribute to coincidence. Mass market publications' descriptions of many of the black women who stated that McMillan told their stories were similar to the descriptions of the women in the research group. The women had been friends for a number of years, all except one had college degrees; three were not married but had been and were currently divorced single parents; two of the single women were involved in relationships with men, and all but one went to the same hairdresser, who was also a member of the group. The women were voracious consumers and proud of it. They drove some of the same cars mentioned in the novel – BMW, Mercedes, utility vehicles, and Chrysler minivans – and shopped for solace, comfort and a release of tension. (p. 15)

Through this list of the (material) characteristics of the black middle-class women, Bobo establishes a rather oversimplified model of textual identification. What she does not do is to 'read' her subjects on any deeper level: a significant question here is, how might these women's interpretations relate to other, less economically advantaged black women? Another question is whether her inattention to the significance of the constitution of the group stems from Bobo's position as a readily accepted member of the group. Bobo herself comes to be seen as a plausible McMillan-type character.

On the question of representativeness and sample size, Bobo turns

3 Rosalind Brunt 'Engaging with the popular: audiences for mass culture and what to say about them' in Lawrence Grossberg et al (eds) *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp. 69–80

to an essay by Rosalind Brunt 'Engaging in the popular: audiences for mass culture and what to say about them'.³ Her use of Brunt's essay is rather questionable. Bobo brings the essay in towards the beginning of a section headed 'Essentialist black women' and uses a quotation from Brunt's piece to anticipate claims that her sample is unrepresentative (p. 24). In her article, Brunt suggests that rather than think of the 'representative' in terms of generalizability, we should think about it in terms of the 'typical'. In this usage, 'representative' means that it is acceptable to use specific or exceptional cases in order to delineate and explicate the 'norm'. This concept should not be used to mask the underdeveloped methodological problems I have outlined, which is how it functions here. The concentration on what the respondents say, with little by way of explanation of the conditions under which utterances were made, also points to a lack of concern with the conventions of presenting research findings. Bobo eschews concepts like 'validity' and 'reliability', a strategy which may be read as a subversion of the orthodoxies of qualitative research but which equally may serve to undermine the status of the findings.

One of the points made repeatedly throughout the section dealing with African-American women's responses to Spielberg's *The Colour Purple* is that the 'problems' with the text lie in the fact that it was directed by a white man. Although it is not actually spelt out, there is an overriding sense that, for Bobo at least, it would be impossible to conceive of a white person (and especially a man) being able to direct such a film and to retain the 'authenticity' of Alice Walker's novel. It would be interesting to find out Bobo's and her respondents' responses to (African-American male actor) Forest Whitaker's direction of the film version of *Waiting to Exhale* (1996).

In spite of arguments against the celebration of black texts simply for being there, Bobo limits her critiques of works by black women. She feels it is necessary both to assert and insert black female works into critical cultural discourse, and I would go along with this strategy to an extent. However, the assertion of the right of black women's works to be given serious critical attention is undermined by taking an uncritical stance towards their texts, it is of little benefit either to the woman who has produced the text, or the prospective audience. It is possible to acknowledge, for example, that part of the power of *Daughters of the Dust* lies in its attempt to re-mythologize black women so that historical agency is reconstructed and restored, whilst recognizing that its strategies are sometimes alienating to a wider audience. It is also important to question the extent to which reading such texts constitutes an act of cultural resistance which may lead to political resistance.

Bobo presents us with a (too) neat binary with her criticism of Spielberg's film, and her affirmation of the value of Dash's work. The white man who is unable to read, interpret and deliver satisfactorily a black women's novel to the screen is opposed to the black woman

who gives other black women what they want and need to sustain them. This oversimplified dichotomy is subverted to some extent by Bobo's respondents who acknowledge the power of Spielberg's work. What does come across from Bobo's research is the extent to which African-American women are hungry for a greater diversity of representations of their experiences. This desire is, of necessity, of a different order to that of white women, since the lives of the latter do constantly – although incompletely and in terms that are frequently demeaning – have their existence and importance confirmed through representation.

Sexuality is only tentatively inserted into the frame for Bobo, and she avoids sustained, detailed comments on the subject. This is important in regard to both the book and the film of *The Colour Purple*. It has been argued (by Alice Walker amongst others) that the love between Shug and Celie in the text is woman-centred rather than definable as lesbian, and it is important to understand that some African-American women writers have wished to make such a distinction for political reasons.⁴ Danielle, one of Bobo's respondents, says in relation to the film, that ‘“When people started talking about homosexuality and lesbianism, that really offended me”’ (p. 115). Curiously, Bobo does not comment on this remark and leaves several questions hanging in the air: in what sense was the talk of lesbianism offensive rather than simply mistaken?; what is revealed and what is obscured by such a remark?; is the woman speaking lesbian?; were lesbian women offended for the same reasons?; and why does Bobo not elaborate on this response and the vigorous agreement of her other respondents with the comment?

As an African-American woman there is a feeling that she must have more complete access to her black women subjects than, say, a black man or a white woman; her racialized identity confers on her an assumption of authority I think this needs questioning and not only in relation to Bobo's work. There are still relatively few black academics doing empirical work in the area of Cultural Studies, and the question of how black researchers are positioned in relation to black and white subjects in the interview situation is yet to be thoroughly addressed.

Audience and identity in another place

The problem of trying to link the complex debates and theories regarding the formation of, and shifts in, the understanding of racial, ethnic, cultural and social identities is one that exercises the minds of many academics working in the field of Cultural Studies. It is important because the debates about modernity, postmodernity, hybridity and syncretism, and identity have been dominated by black intellectuals – and note that this is not an attempt to homogenize, merely an expedient shorthand – who refuse racial fixity, cultural

⁴ See for example, Audre Lorde 'Age, race, class and sex: women redefining difference' in Russell Ferguson et al (eds) *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art 1991) pp. 281–7

stasis and essentialism, and Gillespie rehearses some of these debates in her introductory chapter (pp. 3–12). There are tensions here, since Gillespie is pulled towards a less fluid account than might be expected after her expository narrative of ethnicity and identity. Gillespie is clearly aware that there is a problem about categorizing her subjects and has to admit the term 'Punjabi Londoner' is not comprehensive, however, any uneasiness she may have with the boundaries of the term seems to be dispelled through the frequency of its use.

In contrast to Bobo's underplaying of her own racialized identity, Gillespie initially foregrounds hers. Gillespie claims that her background as an Irish Catholic gave her a special insight into the situations and conflicts which her respondents encountered as 'young Punjabi Londoners'. This reference to biographical detail is one of a number of aspects of her background which are used to minimize the extent of her 'difference' from the people whom she is studying. In particular she points to her experience of migration and settlement as key areas of identification with her subjects.⁵

Although Gillespie tackles the difficulties of being a white researcher in a black community, she attempts to cast these problems aside through repeated references to her experience as a teacher in the area, through her status as a migrant of Irish Catholic extraction; through her acceptance by the community, evidenced by invitations to weddings and other family events, through her social encounters with the students at clubs; and through the approval which her informants gave to her written accounts. These references should be juxtaposed with her rebuttal of what she terms the 'postmodern turn in American anthropology' because it 'seems to have abandoned any serious consideration of the problems of validation'. Gillespie attempts to forestall the anticipated criticism of her position as a white woman studying the Other by dismissing critiques of western anthropology's implication as a tool of colonial authority: '... it becomes too crude to talk about methods or ethnographic authority, and more fruitful to talk to ethnographic responsibility' (p. 75). But issues of authority and power are not as easily cast aside as she suggests, and they remain as unresolved issues in the text.

Without the critical framework suggested by the essays in the collection edited by Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, which Gillespie dismissed so readily, she is unable to articulate clearly what is meant by the 'ethnographic responsibility' to which she aspires. How would it be possible to do so without an acknowledgement of ethnography's troubling history of irresponsibility and the repeated betrayals of its objects/subjects of study? In her constant attempts to minimize the difference between herself and the people she interviews, Gillespie stresses that there is nonetheless enough difference left for her to be able to maintain sufficient distance from her subjects.

I want briefly to consider some points regarding chapter three which

5 The attempt to locate the self in this way has been called into question by a number of feminists who have argued for a revision of the politics of location. See, for example, Lata Mani who argues that revision is necessary because unlike its initial articulation the relation between experience and knowledge is now seen to be one not of correspondence, but fraught with history, contingency and struggle. Multiple mediations: feminist scholarship in the age of multinational scholarship in Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit (eds) *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge* (Cambridge Polity 1992) p. 308.

presents particular problems in regard to its credibility; more specifically, some of the mistakes call into question Gillespie's claim to 'ethnographic responsibility'. Gillespie's focus here is on the conflict between grandparents' 'appropriation' of video technology for the instruction and reinforcement of traditional values through the showing of 'devotional' texts, and the young people's attempted subversion of these efforts (p. 78). Gillespie goes on to describe the history of the production and distribution of Indian films, in the course of which she states, 'in the early 1970s videos were also delivered and exchanged by local milkmen' (p. 78). Apart from the question of where these 'milkmen' got the videotapes from, if, as Gillespie says a little later, 'Many families in Southall obtained VCRs as early as 1978' how then were these earlier videos being viewed? (p. 79). This may seem like a trivial point but it is an indication that there are some loose ends in this chapter. More seriously, Gillespie shifts from asserting that the chapter 'offers some general insights into TV and video viewing among Punjabi London families' to devoting a substantial portion of the chapter to detailing the responses of the members of a Hindi family from Calcutta (p. 76). Thus the religious background of the Dhanis does not correspond to Gillespie's earlier description of the focus of the chapter. This reads as an erasure of the religious difference between respondents.⁶ It is not that Gillespie does not acknowledge that the Dhanis are Hindi; she does. The problem is that having stated that the chapter is concerned with one group, her switch to another has the effect of suggesting that any 'Indian' family may be considered representative.

As with Bobo, the issue of the mediated nature of the discourses of the subjects of research is under-elaborated, though Gillespie's attempt at self-effacement is conducted more openly than Bobo's. Gillespie claims that, 'The ethnographer reads the world, as she reads mediated messages, *through the eyes of her informants themselves*; she focuses on the microprocesses of daily uses, interpretations and identifications' (p. 1, emphasis mine) I think that to claim to be able to see through the eyes of others here is serious error of judgement. How can this be the case? How is it possible to inhabit the body of another person, let alone a 'community'? The difficulty of such a claim is that it is a clear echo of the colonial anthropological enterprise: it aims to 'read the world', and to detail and monitor the views of those designated the objects of research.

In summary, the strength of Bobo's work is also her weakness, that is the ease with which she is able to converse with her subjects. She has a much firmer grasp of the history of the interpretative community she is studying, and of what is at stake for black women in society as a whole than does Gillespie. There is also an evident relish of the work that she has undertaken which is in contrast to Gillespie's sometimes

⁶ Bilkis Malek makes this argument in chapter one of her forthcoming PhD thesis I am indebted to her for detailed comments on Gillespie's understanding of religious affiliations

rather dry account of her research. This insight into community is not, at the moment, one that is so readily available to those perceived as outsiders. That is not to say that being an 'insider' is always and of necessity an advantage for the researcher: to claim that would be to revert to the homogenization of 'black' and 'white' and would constitute a failure to take account of the interconnections between 'race', class, gender, religion and sexuality.

The point about who does the research is important, and this is why Gillespie feels compelled to reassure us on this count. For me it has the opposite effect. It would perhaps have been better not to call upon her Irish Catholicism as an authenticating experience, since the questions of the differences between such experiences and those of her subjects is brought into sharp focus. Some of the problems with these two texts are beyond the control of the authors – whose works, I should note, deserve close critical attention of a kind not possible here – and lie in the lack of empirical research in these areas of audience/readership and ethnicity. Each should stimulate debate and further fieldwork, and that will be a valuable contribution to knowledge in this neglected area of Cultural Studies.

review:

Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, 222 pp.

SARA AHMED

The question of how gender, race and sexuality mutually inform each other in the production of subjectivities has become a pressing one. This question, if it is to be adequately addressed, demands a shift in critical thinking within cultural studies and film studies. Points of identification can no longer be understood as singular or discrete; power relations cannot be understood in simply analogous or additive terms; and the instability of categories (such as 'woman' and 'black') can be seen to function as a trace of their over-determination by a complex and complicated set of antagonistic social relations. I therefore welcome Lola Young's *Fear of the Dark* as an example of such a shift in critical thinking on the relation between cinema, subjectivity and power. Her analysis of British films, mainly from the 1950s to the 1980s, demonstrates how race, gender and sexuality are mutually articulated categories. Mobilizing a variety of different theoretical frameworks – including psychoanalysis and materialist social theory – Young provides a comprehensive survey of how British cinema has been implicated in the production of hegemonic white masculinities, and the othering of black women, within the broader theatre of empire itself.

Young's analysis ranges from early colonialist films such as *The Song of Freedom* (1936), to more recent films such as *Mona Lisa* (1986), where race is embedded, without being made explicit through a strong black presence (p. 166). She considers white and black films alongside each other, while at the same time recognizing that both

categories are not essential – she defines them loosely in terms of who controls the means of production, but does not assume that relations of production fully determine the text (pp. 3, 136). Her emphasis on historical shifts in the discourses which naturalize and classify race also involves an analysis of the ways in which, 'historically, discourses of gender and sexuality have been racialized' (p. 4). These histories are defined not as transparent, but as mediating and articulating the notions relating to racial difference, gender and sexuality (p. 2). A focus on histories of filmic representation demands an analysis of how differences are mediated in relation to each other.

Young's analysis emphasizes the continuities and shifts in racialized thinking from nineteenth-century evolutionary biology to the cultural essentialism of 1970s and 1980s Britain. Her analysis of colonialism ranges from a consideration of primitivism, the scopophilic logic of chromotism (the reduction of race to skin colour), and the pathologization of differences. Indeed, Young's argument relates modes of othering to specific inscriptions of the other as embodied. Those who embody otherness and difference become the focus for the projection of fear, anxiety and rage (p. 183). Young discusses, for example, how blackness becomes constituted as a sign of a potential disorder which threatens the unified ego of the white male bourgeois subject (p. 52). She also considers eugenics to demonstrate how black people – as well as other marginalized subjects such as the working-class, prostitutes and lesbians – come to signify disease and decay which threaten the moral order and 'health' of the white family, community and nation. Sexuality is constructed as disorderly and dirty, and various others become pathologized in the event of being seen as embodying the sexual realm (p. 50). Drawing on the work of theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Franz Fanon and Sander Gilman, this historical approach enables Young to trace how race becomes reproduced and contested as a set of 'knowledges' (in part about the sexuality of others).

Young's approach to the identification of race, gender and sexuality within films moves us beyond an investigation of either 'positive' or 'negative' stereotypes of black men and women. Rather she discusses the histories in which these stereotypes become circulated as the truth, asking 'how did these stereotypes start and why?' (p. 1). Young examines the ways in which cinema is implicated in the apparatuses of vision and knowledge that render race, gender and sexuality culturally intelligible. The relation between science, empiricism and film (as a primary example of visual culture) is explored then in terms of *the power to look*, and hence to categorize and name the other. Young's analysis of film moves from an analysis of representation to enunciation. This means that we need to move beyond the notion that black people are misrepresented in film, beyond, that is, the assumption of a division between true representations (the real) and false representations (ideology) (pp. 5, 7).

Young brings together psychoanalysis with a materialist understanding of how specific power relations operate to produce competing subjectivities. This act of 'bringing together' enables her to recognize how race, gender and sexuality involve the psychic and embodied realms of phantasy, desire and projection, as well as broader social and structural relations that constitute the limits to any subject's mobility. Film is discussed as a site of struggle not simply over meaning and power, but also over phantasies. Indeed, *Fear of the Dark* provides us with excellent analysis of how racial phantasies (which often involve the construction of the black woman as hypersexual) become displaced from the literal scene of the text (p. 63). Such phantasies may be displaced onto the very landscape in which the action of the film takes place. Young discusses, for example, how in *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) the landscape itself figures the desirability and danger of the African woman as the other which must be dominated and controlled by the white, male agent of colonialism (p. 63).

Her approach to film involves a substantial critique of some previous models of how film produces points of identification for spectators. Partly this begins as a critique of the hegemonic position of psychoanalysis within film studies. For example, Young considers how a psychoanalytic approach to identification in the work of theorists such as Laura Mulvey involves the privileging of sexual difference and the elision of race. Young suggests that simply reading the inscription of woman in terms of the disavowal and affirmation of difference (woman as fetish) elides the discourse of whiteness in which the 'woman' is seeable as a privileged figure. As Young argues, black women are not subject to 'overvaluation' in the same way (p. 15). Indeed, the critique of psychoanalysis also relates to Young's critique of ethnocentrism in white feminist discourse; the way in which a psychoanalytic feminism tends to position race as secondary and derivative. Hence she investigates how the psychoanalytic feminist approach to the Freudian metaphor 'woman is a dark continent' fails to recognize that the analogy between woman and blackness became intelligible through colonialism. Young suggests that rather than simply using psychoanalysis to illustrate the working of film, psychoanalysis needs to be rearticulated with an awareness of its historical limits. This constitutes the necessity of investigating the relation between psychoanalysis and colonialism.

Young's critique of dominant approaches to film also involves a critique of 'anti-realism' (p. 134). Rather than seeing politics as inherent in filmic form, Young argues that the politics of film is dependent on its eliciting of a complex set of identifications and disidentifications for historically situated spectators. The argument that classical realism simply reproduces dominant ideologies through interpellating the spectator into the 'real' of the diegesis cannot deal with the way in which social contradictions render impossible any

narrative closure. She analyses how spectators are encouraged (but not forced) to adopt the perspective of the white, male colonizer in a variety of different kinds of films (p. 10). Thus in her reading of *Leo the Last* (1969) she examines both how the narrative progresses from the perspective of the male dominant imperial eye/I, as well as the way in which the film problematizes whiteness (p. 115). Young's argument implies that neither 'realism' or 'anti-realism' can be privileged in a black or feminist aesthetic. Her refusal to endorse an antirealist aesthetic also means she recognizes, following bell hooks, that marginalized subjects must seize the power to look (back) in different ways and genres (p. 135).

One of the immense values of her analysis is the way in which her readings of films make clear how 'the black woman' becomes enunciated. She defines her feminist project as 'to draw attention to both the presence and absence of black women and to try and account for these instances of visibility and invisibility' (p. 13). Young analyses the inscription of the black woman as a site of anxiety as well as desire, not only for white men, but also for black men and white women. For white men, black women represent a double negation of the ordered self (p. 20). For white women, their racial privilege may manifest itself through their right to look at the black women (p. 61). Young's analysis of black films, in particular *Pressure* (1974), demonstrates how black women, for black men, may be seen as inhibitors to black male accession to patriarchal rule. Or, as is the case in *Burning an Illusion* (1981), black women may be transformed into politicized subjects only though being contained within a discourse of appropriate femininity; the female character's transformation is mediated through a change in how she looks (p. 157). Here, Young demonstrates that the question of film's enunciative authority – and there are few black women filmmakers – is not just whether or how the black woman becomes seen, but how and when she becomes the seen.

However, it is the very usefulness and scope of *Fear of the Dark* that also determines its limits. The text does provide us with a comprehensive analysis of the relation between gender, race and sexuality within and beyond film. At times it tries to be too comprehensive, this means that there are few close readings of particular theoretical texts – or indeed films, apart from *Leo the Last* (1960). As a result, some of her representations of other texts are inadequate and gloss over points of contradictions. Indeed, the 'smoothness' of *Fear of the Dark* can partly be understood as its tendency to represent the arguments of other writers only to construct its own position in contrast to them. Given this, Young does not achieve depth in some of her critical readings.

I was also concerned about her treatment of the question of resistance. Clearly, Young's analysis does locate resistance within the play of the text. No text achieves narrative closure and eliminates the

contradictions embedded in the interrelation of gender, sexuality and race. For example in her discussion of 'passing', she locates passing, 'as a sign of racial duplicity which threatens to undermine the stability of racial categorisation' (p. 85), and as 'transgressing racial boundaries' (p. 91). Passing is transgressive because the act of a black woman passing as white, in films such as *Sapphire* (1959), calls into question our ability to see and know the difference. However, what is lacking here is an understanding of how such acts of transgression become *reincorporated* in the dominant forms of articulating the other. For example, the crisis of not being able to see the other can be resolved through new forms of knowledge and surveillance (how else can we know her difference if we cannot see her). While Young does discuss film in terms of relations of production, distribution and consumption, she needs to spend more time discussing how such 'textual transgressions' relate to the possibility of material(izable) social change.

Young's analysis does not deal with the broader implications of some of the questions she explicitly raises. Her analysis is also limited by her failure to ask certain questions in the first place. This is especially clear in relation to the category of black. Young does position 'black' as a discursively constructed category. However, I was unclear as to whether she was using 'black' to refer to Afro-Caribbean subjects, or as an inclusive politicized category to refer to those subjects who have been othered through the privileging and normalization of whiteness. This becomes problematic in her discussion of Orientalism. On the one hand, she refers to Said's Orientalism as a way of understanding the function and effect of colonial discourses in general (p. 57), but on the other, Young is critical of Shohat's analysis in terms of its privileging of the 'veiled woman' as a figure of the mysterious and desirable other (p. 20). She argues that such an equation between the veiled woman and the other elides the specificity of the discourse around African women's sexuality. What then is the relation between Orientalism as a particular form of othering and the othering of the black woman? Is the black woman a figure for the other beyond the trope of the veil? The refusal to address whether black, Orient and other are particular or inclusive categories makes her argument both contradictory and ambiguous in places.

I also felt at times that *Fear of the Dark* was too simplistic in its reading of how race, gender and sexuality become mutually articulated. Most often this articulation is defined in terms of the sexualization of the racial other, and the spillage between the racial other and woman. However, this leaves out many other forms of articulation. I was particularly concerned that the complex set of ideological relations between compulsory heterosexuality and forms of colonialism was not really addressed. While much emphasis was placed on the outlawing of miscegenation, less emphasis was placed

on how the enforcement of sexuality with the structure of the white heterosexual couple was linked to the reproduction of British colonialism.

Related to this, I thought that Young's analysis of interracial sexual relations as the subject of taboo had a tendency to be reductive. The outlawing of miscegenation is an important symptom of the need to protect the binarism of white/black through projecting what is undesirable onto the figure of black (who, in this way, comes to stand for that which must be kept 'outside' the boundaries of the white subject). However, 'difference' is not simply affirmed through colonialism. Difference is also disavowed. The re-presentation of difference can unsettle the claim to mastery and originality of the white colonial subject. To this extent, miscegenation can be simultaneously tabooed and sanctioned as a form of cultural assimilation (ways of making the unsettling difference unseeable).¹ This constitutes what is missing in Young's account of miscegenation: the ambivalence of colonial discourses in relation to "differences".

Despite these criticisms, I think *Fear of the Dark* is an important and interesting text. Not only does it provide a critique of previous understandings of the relation between film, sexuality, gender and race, but it also constitutes a positive and affirmative way of rethinking those relations. I hope that it will help create a space for an alternative approach to film which will enable us to trace the specific positioning of black women.

¹ This was especially clear in relation to British policy in Australia, where miscegenation and the policy of removing half-caste Aboriginal children was a fundamental part of the project of assimilation (involving the desire to remove all traces of blackness). For an analysis of the ambivalence of colonial discourses in relation to differences see Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge 1994). For an account of the multifold histories of thinking around miscegenation and hybridity see Robert Young *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge 1995).

review:

Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, 265 pp.

LYNNE PEARCE

Emotion – how we name it, talk about it, evaluate its significance – may be seen as one of the few remaining wilderness areas of textual analysis and reception theory. In the postscript to the second edition of *Women's Pictures*, Annette Kuhn throws out a challenge in precisely this direction by observing that there must be more to the future of [feminist] film scholarship than ever more sophisticated psycho/textual analysis, a further problematization of authorship, or a revised psychology of spectator-text relations.¹ In the way that they have been developed, at least, none of these areas of study has managed to account for the way in which 'cinema often engages emotion or proposes emotional responses':

But can every emotional engagement with cinema be understood in terms of textual rhetoric, or even metapsychology? Can such engagements be explained within the terms of apparatus theory? Would they better be accounted for in terms of cultural-studies-style explanations framed in terms, say, of prior knowledges and cultural competencies? Or is there some excess, something that goes beyond all these explanations? If so, how might it be theorized?²

The implication here, of course, and one that is especially pertinent *vis-à-vis* Murray Smith's book, where it is not spelt out as clearly as it might be, is that the engagement of cinematic emotion gives the impression of theoretical 'excess' precisely because of its location in *both* text and audience. Although *Engaging Emotions* follows a strong

¹ Annette Kuhn *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* second edition (London and New York: Verso 1994)

² *Ibid* p 206

structuralist line in as much as spectators remain, for the most part, the subjects of a complex textual positioning, it is significant that in the latter stages of the analysis Smith is obliged to invoke an extratextual 'moral' framework to explain how spectators form their emotional 'allegiance'. The source of emotion thus moves from the text's narratorial and other positioning devices to the cultural and historical discourses in which it is produced, consumed and circulated.

This problem of 'where' emotion is to be located and who or what, as a consequence, becomes the 'object of study' may, of course, be seen as part of the more general history of reader and reception theory. In research for my own forthcoming book, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, I observed that two things, in particular, have frustrated a more advanced investigation into the emotional dimension of the reading/viewing process.³ First, the tendency of all theorists working in this area to concentrate on the 'how' rather than the 'what' of reader-experience (that is, how readers are positioned/how 'meaning' is produced rather than a more ontological investigation of what form reading/viewing takes); and second, an overwhelming emphasis (in psychoanalytically based film theory in particular) on reader/viewer *pleasure* to the extent that most emotions have been thought about within an economy of 'desire', with the consequence that many others (apparently outside this economy) never get named. And although one might expect this emphasis on emotion (and pleasure) in relation to 'meaning-production' to be the focus of 'text' rather than 'audience' theorists, it is significant that even those whose 'object of study' is ostensibly 'the reader/viewer' (for example, Norman Holland and numerous, more recent, film and television theorists) are still predominantly concerned with *how* audiences come to feel what they do. As a consequence, the fantastic spectrum of emotions experienced by readers and viewers in each and every textual engagement remains a vast, uncharted wilderness.

Smith's book, whilst a welcome and significant contribution to the discussions on 'how' readers and their emotions are 'produced' through textual engagement, does little to redress this tendency. It is significant, for example, how few emotions are actually *named* in the text. For the most part, the viewer's 'affective' relationship to the films discussed (a combination of Classic Hollywood and Contemporary Avant Garde) is limited to expressions of 'sympathy' and 'antipathy', and whilst a number of the readings explore the complex and confusing shifts between these positions/positionings it is still within the context of a model that sees all emotion as an expression of 'liking' or 'not liking' the character concerned. This, I would suggest, is a very limited and limiting strand within the huge emotional vocabulary that each and every one of us carries around within us: fear, jealousy, hope, devotion, tenderness, frustration, joy, agony, fulfillment are, for example, all emotional conditions that cannot be brought within this dialectic of sympathy/antipathy – for the

3 Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Edward Arnold, forthcoming).

good reason that these emotions belong to an alternative model of text-reader/viewer relations which is predicated not only upon 'identification with' but also 'desire for' the 'textual other', whoever or *whatever* that might be

This last point brings me crucially to those features which define Smith's work, and which make it a very interesting project in its own terms, but which also register its limitations. First, the reason why the emotional vocabulary of Smith's text is confined to expressions of sympathy/antipathy is, of course, because it is a study of emotional engagement *via character*. Indeed, the study is predicated on the belief that 'Character structures are perhaps the major way by which narrative texts solicit our assent for particular values, practices, and ideologies' (p. 4). That is to say, it is principally through our 'identification' with textual characters that we are emotionally engaged by visual and other texts. From this starting point, which he concedes is 'at once widely held and deeply unfashionable' (p. 4), it is Smith's objective to produce a more sophisticated model of what we mean by 'identification'. In the chapters which follow he explores three 'levels of engagement' which together constitute the text's 'structure of sympathy'. These are *recognition*, *alignment* and *allegiance*, and all are models of consciousness/human interaction derived from analytic philosophy and cognitive anthropology rather than psychoanalysis. From a more structuralist base, Smith also insists on the fundamental role played by *narrative* in the construction of all these 'levels of engagement'. The first of the three terms, *recognition* refers to the way in which spectators construct characters as 'individuated and continuous human agents' (p. 82) to which they can relate. According to Smith, this is an *a priori* requirement of all emotional engagement, despite a huge poststructuralist pressure from Barthes onwards to think of characters as fragmentary bundles of relations. *Alignment*, meanwhile, describes the process by which spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know or feel. *Vis-à-vis* reader response theory, alignment thus corresponds closely to Genette's concept of 'focalization', and in film theory to 'point-of-view' (which Smith nevertheless distinguishes himself from). *Allegiance*, finally, is the term employed by Smith to refer to 'the moral evaluation of characters by the spectator' and – as I indicated earlier – is an aspect of the text–viewer relationship which necessarily moves agency away from the text to the discursive universe inhabited by its audience. While not all readers will find Smith's reasons for discussing emotional allegiance in terms of 'morality' rather than 'ideology' entirely convincing, this is certainly the most suggestive 'level of engagement' (explored through readings of films like *Strike* and *Fragment of an Empire*) in as much as it does, indeed, start to deal with emotional affects/effects which are apparently outside of the control of the text and are concerned with the 'what' as well as the 'how' of readerly experience.

Elsewhere in the text, Smith's readings in cognitive psychology lead him to far more deterministic theories of how and why viewers get 'involved' with particular characters including 'motor and affective mimicry'. He finds the latter one of the few ways in which we can satisfactorily explain the viewer's 'central empathising' as opposed to 'acentral sympathising' with textual characters (a distinction itself based on the work of Smith's key theoretical referent, Noel Carroll). Allowing for the fact (following Carroll) that viewers do not need to 'inhabit' the emotions of a character in order to feel sympathy for them (all that is required is 'an understanding of the situation from a character's point of view' [p. 79]), Smith illustrates, through a detailed analysis of two Hitchcock films, that we may nevertheless achieve empathy by an involuntary 'mimicking' of the physical and facial expressions of the central characters.

In summary, then, it can be seen that Smith's consideration of the role of emotion within the reading/viewing process is limited by his exclusive focus on the character-spectator relationship, and by seeing that relationship purely in terms of identification. In its own terms, this gives rise to some useful and suggestive discussion on how texts position and involve their readers and viewers, but at the same time leaves many unanswered questions about the way in which readers are engaged by texts *other* than via character, and the extent to which – both inside a humanistic model of self-other relations and beyond it – readers and viewers engage with texts through ideologically motivated processes of desire as well as ones of identification. Some possible answers to these questions emerge in the interstices of Smith's own text (the concept of 'acentral sympathising' may be seen as the first step towards deconstructing a humanist model of character-viewer relations, for example), but what the project must really alert us to is the need to find a way of thinking about emotional experience outside of meaning production *per se*. We need to establish a vocabulary of affective response in advance of theorizing its production: we need to chart the wilderness before we seek to tame it.

review:

**Patricia Zimmermann, *Reel Families: a Social History of Amateur Film*.
Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, 188pp.**

JANINE MARCHESSAULT

Amateur film is an area of research that, surprisingly, has received very little attention within film studies. Historical accounts of the cinema have typically occluded amateur film production. If the amateur has a place in the study of film culture it has always been as a spectator, and in its more recent cultural studies incarnation, as the film buff or fan club member. Since the 1960s, film studies has sought to validate its status as an academic discipline by focusing on the public and the professional sphere of its culture. The institutionalization of the discipline, the demands of curricula and the growth of a publishing industry (especially in the USA) demanded rigorous theoretical models in which to analyse the screen. Conceptualized differently as institutional, aesthetic or psychological process, the methodological grid of film studies has historically been organized around the collective experience of common culture. The pervasive use of camcorders and the rise of new interactive technologies have come to foreground the theoretical absence of amateurism in film and media studies – not least because amateur films and videos are now valuable commodities imbuing commercial media with the political disinterest and authenticity of the nonprofessional.

Patricia Zimmermann's *Reel Families a Social History of Amateur Film* provides an invaluable and timely consideration of the discourses that have helped to shape the amateur film over the past century. Zimmermann's book can be read as a direct response to the

invisibility of this category in historical accounts of the cinema. It also seeks to challenge previous ethnographic approaches to nonprofessional visual communication. Writings on amateur film and photography, whether these be from an anthropological (Richard Chalfen, Sol Worth and John Adair), art historical (Julia Hirsch), sociological (Susan Sontag) or avant-garde (Jonas Mekas and George Kuchar) perspective, have all had one thing in common: they take amateur image-making to be immune from the ideological strictures and economic infrastructure of professional communication. Analysis of amateur films in particular, has suffered from this view, producing studies which are text-centred and ahistorical.

Zimmermann's book places amateur film production within the historical context of its development. Amateur film is seen as a discursive construct and a category of production that has undergone several transformations since 1897. Its practices carry a range of values, cultural assumptions and technologies that at once depend upon, and are directly opposed to, professional and political interests. *Reel Families* parts company with previous examinations of amateur film by exploring the complex power relations that distinguish professional from amateur media technologies, public from private cultural practices. The central problematic the book seeks to understand is one that Hans Magnus Enzensberger raised as a hopeful possibility in 1974 in *The Consciousness Industry*: that citizens, armed with movie cameras, might document their everyday political realities rather than summer vacations. Zimmermann examines the historical processes that worked against this kind of emancipation. Why did the mass dissemination of home-movie cameras not lead to an expansion of democratic expression? How did amateur film practices become identified with home movies? Why were idealized family archives produced rather than political exposés? In short, Zimmermann is concerned with the public discourses and industry decisions that have positioned 'do-it-yourself' films outside the realms of political engagement.

Relying on the methodologies and insights of discourse analysis, *Reel Families* focuses on three historical aspects simultaneously: the non-discursive structures of amateur production, which include both the economic and technological development of specific technologies; the public discourses that position and define amateur practices (disseminated through technical manuals, professional journals, the popular press and magazines); and some of the actual films that, since the turn of the century, have come under the rubric of amateur production. Zimmermann's undertaking is both a useful and highly original contribution to film scholarship, presenting the reader with a nuanced historical reading of this largely uncharted terrain. The social history she maps is located in the USA, where the business of making films was, since its beginnings, distinguished by a vigorous professionalism. Not only did the film industry's professional codes

support the standardization of production, distribution and exhibition, but these also served to erect powerful technological barriers. This worked to inhibit competition from individual entrepreneurs while consolidating economic monopolies for the established manufacturers who retained patent rights. Up until the 1920s, amateurism was associated with the entrepreneurial spirit of American individualism. It retained the utopian core of capitalist modernity: plurality, self-expression, creativity. Zimmermann writes: 'Amateur film became the domain where one mastered and controlled technology, in contradiction to work where technology and technocracy controlled the worker' (p. 23). This particular engagement with technology in amateur film discourse was to change significantly after the standardization of the 16mm format and the mass marketing of amateur equipment in 1923.

To expand the market for film technologies in the 1920s, large manufacturers like Bell and Howell and Eastman Kodak redefined amateur film production as a consumer item, targeting the middle- and upper-class family with a flurry of advertising campaigns. The 16mm format, along with film stocks and projection systems was limited to private exhibition, defined in opposition to the 35mm format which was the professional standard. The strict division between amateur and professional technologies, Zimmermann underlines, proved to be a useful marketing ploy for selling amateur film cameras that were easy to operate but able to achieve professional results. Moreover, amateur film journals and manuals would increasingly stress the importance of achieving a professional look, recommending that amateur filmmakers learn to mimic Hollywood's narrative style. Thus amateurism is defined by the manufacturers in terms of its deviation from Hollywood's aesthetic norms and technologies which it must, nevertheless, seek to emulate.

Zimmermann's book provides a fascinating and detailed account of the manufacturing history of amateur film technology, uncovering how these in turn informed professional standards in the educational film market (developed during the Depression) and World War II film production. The war repositioned the amateur film, professionalizing the 16mm format to perform a documentary function and to reconfigure a new realist style that would mirror the uncontrolled realities of war. The postwar affluence of the 1950s sees the complete conflation of amateur films with home movies and a renewed emphasis on the distinction between amateur and professional technologies, with 8mm gaining a strong foothold in the home-movie market. The division between the amateur and professional formats supported a hierarchical structure that in the 1950s would translate into class. Cheaper cameras were technologically simpler, they required less expertise to operate them but they also gave the operator less control over the image. In stark contrast to the definition of amateurism at the turn of the century, where the technological mastery

of the individual was celebrated, by the 1950s the amateur filmmaker is marked by a lack of technical expertise

Zimmermann is most critical of this period in amateur film history which was so entrenched in the rapidly expanding leisure market of the postwar period (p. 115). The demographics of amateur film production in the USA were bound to a white suburban middle class who could both afford the technologies and had the leisure time to use them. With leisure time spent mostly around the home, amateur movie making was marketed as a recreational activity for the nuclear family (p. 133). Thus, the amateur film came to reinforce strict divisions between work and leisure, the home and the public sphere, the family and a larger social community. The home movie functioned as a family archive (mostly of child rearing and shot mostly by fathers [p. 123]), ensuring that the ideology of happy familialism could itself be consumed in the home. The reduction of leisure time to consumption, and the imposition of professional norms on home-movie practices, served to professionalize private life. The social history of *Reel Families* comes to an end in 1962 in that 'limited, privatized, isolated site: the nuclear family'. The ideologies of this site, and of home movies generally, generated a rich culture in the US experimental film movement of the 1950s and 1960s (including Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Ken Jacobs and others). Moreover, in the 1980s a new generation of daughters would begin making movies with Dad's camera.

Reel Families is a very useful book for film and media scholars. Meticulously researched, it provides an important exploration of the relation between technologies, economic interests and popular discourses in the USA. It does not offer a linear history of amateur film, and it makes no claims to comprehensiveness. By focusing on the historical development of specific formats and the marketing strategies employed by the manufacturers, Zimmermann is able to discern an underlying discursive pattern that has progressively narrowed the field of production, 'from an economic definition to an aesthetic deviation to a social function' (p. 145).

One of the necessary limitations of a social history like *Reel Families* is that it must rely on the materiality of discourses rather than the films themselves. Zimmermann does attempt to incorporate readings of amateur films into her analysis. However, these are limited in terms of their empirical appeal and, in the end, I found them the least convincing part of the book. Although *Reel Families* counteracts previous writings on amateur film which simply position it outside professional culture, the book tends towards the other extreme, presenting an overdetermined image of amateur film practice. This overdetermination is fuelled, in part, by the basic presupposition underlying the study: why the emancipatory potential of amateur media technologies was not fulfilled. This claim is largely unsubstantiated. We never know whose version of emancipation

Zimmermann assumes to have failed? Is it not possible to find in the production and consumption of personal images and family memories a form of democratic expression instead of discursive colonization *tout court*? Moreover, recent work in the area of home movies is uncovering all sorts of distinctive and even empowering practices¹

¹ See for example Tom Waugh *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

To be sure, Zimmermann provides ample evidence to show how amateur film culture of the 1950s and 1960s is class specific. That it is tied to the ideology of the nuclear family and to an entire apparatus of middle-class consumption cannot be disputed. But the description *Reel Families* offers us of a 1956 home movie enacting the 'spectacle of paternity' overlooks one essential thing. The images of the Christmas ritual, the 'dolls, stuffed animals, a rocking horse, a red fire truck' (p. 112) belong to people – just like memories. While the meanings that home movies convey do not exceed formal analysis, they cannot be reduced to discourse. Spectatorial engagement with one's own home movies is intensely personal and recognition is idiosyncratic even within or perhaps especially within families. This is something Roland Barthes struggled with towards the end of his life 'There I was, alone in the apartment where she had died, looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the truth of the face I had loved. And I found it.'² What some have characterized negatively as Barthes's return to phenomenology in *Camera Lucida*, I think signals his recognition that photographic images cannot be subjected to the 'civilized code of perfect illusions'.³ This is why the distinction between discourse and practice is necessary, and indeed *Reel Families* asserts this 'slippery' problem from the outset. Yet the problem is not whether there exists a 'one-to-one correspondence' between discourse and practice as Zimmermann assumes (the answer to which is 'bound by the availability of amateur film' [p. xiv]) but whether there could ever be a one-to-one correspondence. This last point foregrounds the need for different analytical models and areas of research to be developed around amateur film. This should not underscore the fact that *Reel Families* is a ground-breaking history that has cleared the way for future research.

review:

Norman K. Denzin, *Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema* and *The Cinematic Society: the Voyeur's Gaze*. London: Sage, 1991 and 1995, 179 and 247pp.

CATHERINE CONSTABLE

Although both of these books are by the same author, they are the products of two very different theoretical positions. The four-year interim period may be said to mark Norman Denzin's transition from social realist to Derridean postmodernist. The first book, *Images of Postmodern Society*, is a critique of postmodernity as it is presented in the works of philosophers such as Baudrillard and Lyotard and the films of Hollywood cinema. While this book purports to be an introduction to the field, I would have to argue that the realist slant significantly compromises the accounts of the theorists that are given. The second book, *The Cinematic Society*, is a challenging read, and the film analyses could be used by undergraduates (second and third years). In this, Denzin explores the positioning of the voyeur in relation to three phases of cinema. the realist, the modernist and the postmodern. Each phase is outlined in relation to particular constructions of 'truth' and 'reality'. The schema is the product of a bricolage of philosophical theories borrowing elements from Foucault, Baudrillard and Irigaray.

In *Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema*, Denzin begins by arguing that the postmodern can be seen as the result of the commodification of the image itself. Like Jameson, he sees the proliferation of the image as the inexorable playing out of the

logic of late capitalism. Fundamentally, consumerism is said to objectify masculine ideals. As a result, the postmodern is positioned as ideologically conservative. For Denzin, Jameson's postmodern textual strategies of parody and pastiche simply serve to reinforce a white male economy of representation. In this way, he reads *Blue Velvet* as a parody of the Oedipal trajectory which serves to maintain the conservative ideology that it marks. The reading of *Sex, Lies and Videotape* is closed down in a similar way. The film is said to be a patriarchal version of female sexuality despite Denzin's own observations on the radical portrayal of women's autoeroticism.

From the above account of Denzin's starting point, it should be obvious that I see Jameson as the source of this version of postmodernity. Unfortunately, this theoretical debt is largely unacknowledged. The very critical account of Jameson's work in chapter three does not begin to address the amount that is borrowed from his theories. However, this may be because Denzin is principally interested in combating this masculinist version of postmodernity. He wants to establish a real that has resisted commodification and the consequent processes of imaging. He therefore argues that there is a 'reality of lived experience', that is outside the white middle-class images manufactured by 'the postmodern news machine' (p. 45). This reality is the property of marginalized social groups such as ethnic minorities and women. It is a pure real, uncorrupted by any relation to textuality: 'a reality that stands there waiting to be represented' (p. 45). Denzin reads Spike Lee's film *Do The Right Thing* as a positive imaging of a reality that has previously been deemed 'unrepresentable'.

I would argue that this realist agenda compromises the accounts of Baudrillard and Lyotard that are offered in this book. Denzin operates with a real up his sleeve, waiting to reintroduce it in the most unlikely places. Baudrillard's first order of appearance thus becomes the new repository of everyday experience. This primitive first order is then used to hold the third order of the hyperreal in check. For Denzin, Baudrillard's postmodern individual is 'a cultural dope . . . who can't see through the simulational, hyperreal informational structures presented by the mass media' (p. 35). However, for Baudrillard there would be nothing to see through. Fundamentally, the hyperreal is a fake which operates outside of the binaries fake/genuine or simulation/reality. Denzin's notion of an experiential 'unrepresentable' is a bastardization of Lyotard's 'unrepresentable', that which is excluded by the processes of representation itself. Denzin's real can easily be represented through the processes of imaging, Lyotard's unrepresentable is a challenge to the nature of the image itself. These distortions mean that Denzin does not even present the postmodern as subversive. Students would be far better off reading extracts of these theorists in one of the many edited collections of essays on postmodernity.

In *The Cinematic Society: the Voyeur's Gaze*, Denzin reworks

Jameson's three phases of capitalism as three stages in the history of cinema, namely the realist, the modern and the postmodern. He argues that the cinematic image is initially positioned as an exact representation – 'more real than the real itself' (p. 16). This historical construction has epistemological implications – this image providing access to an absolute truth – as well as functioning as a form of social control – the image as the basis of a new science of criminalistics. Modernity is basically characterized as a disguised form of realism. Modernist films based on narratives of investigation appear to present the truth as subjective, yet one character's perspective will ultimately be positioned as *the truth*. Postmodern films use the technique of self-reflexivity to reveal 'the truth that no truth can be discovered' (p. 192). This postmodern position is the one that Denzin endorses leading him to align himself with Baudrillard and Derrida.

The overarching historical framework is problematic. Classical Hollywood cinema is said to be realist and Hitchcock is presented as a modernist, both readings which could be regarded as highly contentious. However, Denzin is much better when looking at the figure of the voyeur and considering the social and political implications of the gaze. The second chapter outlines constructions of the look as a form of social surveillance via Foucault's panopticon, and as an epistemological paradigm, seeing as knowledge. Denzin deliberately avoids addressing Laura Mulvey's work in any detail in order to keep an open-ended conception of voyeurism in play. This results in some really interesting readings of films that he had completely closed down in his previous book. Both *Blue Velvet* and *Sex, Lies and Videotape* are read with detailed attention to the many structures of gazing within them. As a result Denzin can capitalize on moments of textual fissure rather than subsuming all meaning within an overarching ideological framework.

Ultimately, Denzin wishes to find a way out of the surveillance society where looking defines truth at the expense of the other. This version of the panopticon is made up by combining Foucault, Sartre, Lacan and Merleau-Ponty in a way that eradicates their considerable differences. However, I would also acknowledge that Denzin's way out is interesting even if the dilemma is of his own manufacturing. In chapters four and six he delineates new ways of gazing by focusing on films whose main characters do not have access to the look of truth. His reading of *Black Widow* is particularly good. He draws attention to the multiform and reflexive projects of gazing that structure the film, and argues that certain key moments represent a female–female gaze that is completely different to the look of the surveillance society. Denzin argues that this new female gaze opens the possibility of conceptualizing a 'radically indeterminate universe' (p. 218) in

which there are no objective truths. He positions this reading as Irigarayan, however his valorization of indeterminacy leads me to suggest that this is Derridean postmodernism.

Overall, I would hesitate to recommend this book as an introduction to postmodernity given that a number of the key theorists are not presented in sufficient detail. As a result it could mislead students who are unfamiliar with this field. However, it contains many provocative and interesting analyses of specific films and those seeking a version of a postmodern perspective might well find it a stimulating read.